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NACHA REGULES

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NACHA REGULES

BY

MANUEL GALVEZ

Authorized Translation from the Original Spanish

BY

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I		1
II		18
III		31
IV		45
V		55
VI		68
VII		86
VIII		99
IX		111
X		126
XI		137
XII		148
XIII		158
XIV		173
XV		187
XVI		199
XVII		211
XVIII		219
XIX		230
XX		243
XXI		255
XXII		265
XXIII		281
XXIV		293
EPILOGUE		301

NACHA REGULES

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CHAPTER I

AN August night! Hot with the fever of her adolescence as a national capital, Buenos Aires was ablaze with millions of lights and rejoicing in noisy revelry.

The Centennial festivities had been going on since May. Thousands of people had flocked in from every corner of the country, from neighboring states and even from Europe. During these great days of a nation's coming of age, the crowd, in one enormous, slowly moving procession, thronged the asphalt pavements of the principle avenues. The very streets and houses appeared to be in motion. When, toward evening, the multitude increased, the congestion caused a swelling which, it seemed, must at a given moment burst the bounds on either side. At night some forty theatres, and innumerable movie-houses and concert halls, crammed overflowing masses into their hungry maws, while in the cabarets boisterous licence rubbed elbows with curiosity.

The cabaret, of "the Port"—as Argentina calls its chief city—is a public dance hall: it provides a room, tables for drinking, and an orchestra. The patrons are young men of the upper classes with their mistresses; tourists and rustic sight-seers; and

girls "of the town," who come alone. The tango, almost the only dance seen there, and the orchestra, composed usually of white gangsters and mulattos are—with the champagne bottle and the tuxedo—the normal expressions of the Argentine suburban "soul"!

The musicians sing, shout, strike on the wooden parts of their instruments, gesticulate. The silhouettes of the dancers twist and intertwine, weave in and out across the floor, blend, and neutralize each other; and the mandola, with its dark low tones, underlines the tangos with long shadows of pain.

But there are other things in the cabaret besides dancing. On some nights a sudden outburst of noise, from end to end of the hall, cuts the tango in two, as it were, with an enormous, quivering gash. A man's persistent ogling of another fellow's girl, a violent collision of dancers, the suspicion of ridicule or insult, bring threats from mouths contorted with anger, while revolvers are flourished in the air. The *patota,* the inevitable leading actor in such scenes, is a group of wealthy roisterers whose greatest pleasure is to annoy, insult, attack with fist or weapon, in short, transform peaceable pleasure seeking into a tavern brawl. To show resentment toward a *patota,* to resist its aggressions, is to invite a drubbing from a pack trained to fight as a gang, or an unfailing bullet fired treacherously from behind.

On that August night, in one of these crowded cabarets, frenzied dancing was going on. Some gigantic invisible hand seemed to be reaching down from the top of the hall, and incessantly stirring

the couples round and round. All the tables were full. Champagne bottles raised their aristocratic necks from the icy prisons which held them. Under the glow of the lights evening gowns blazed dazzlingly, and the women's flesh shone gleaming, vibrant, golden, from the low cut dresses. Tangos, tangos, more tangos! With the speed of a movie film, and in chance groupings, graceful poses and involuntary caricatures were sketched. The musicians, caught up in the madness of the throng, shouted phrases of double meanings caught up for the purpose from the latest song hits. A couple of "professionals" suddenly emerged, amidst wild applause, from the common herd of the dance, which opened from the centre to make way; and there, surrounded by a ring of faces, incited by exclamations, admiring and picturesque, the two embraced, separated, and came together again, interminably, with minutely patterned steps and attitudes, to the music of an uneasy, sensuous, ardorous tango, which the mandola tried to sentimentalize with the wails of its deeper notes.

When the exhibition was over, many eyes turned toward a man sitting alone at a little table, conspicuous because he was so gloomy and preoccupied, so completely indifferent to everything that was going on around him. He was well dressed in a black suit that suggested both elegance and severity. His face attracted; magnetic, it might have been called; here, one felt, was a personality, a man who had fought his way up in life through suffering. His features wore an expression of mental and moral disquietude.

Unaccompanied save by his own thoughts, he was, nevertheless, furtively watching a young girl who, with several other people, sat at a table near by. This man was not in nor of the cabaret. When his gaze was not fixed on his pretty neighbor it seemed to be seeking distant worlds, wandering, perhaps, in search of something to fill his solitude or to offer to this girl in one single passionate glance.

The youths with whom she was sitting formed a *patota* of five. She was dividing their attentions with three other women at the table. The men did not belong to aristocratic society, though they were of "good family" as the *porteños*—the people of Buenos Aires—say; the names of their fathers', that is, were well known in politics and business, and appeared frequently in the society columns of the newspapers. As individuals they had no distinction. They talked in loud, obtrusive voices, using terms of gross familiarity in addressing one another. When they laughed it was in a bellowing hilarity calculated to attract attention; just as, when they danced, it was with tremednous waggles of hips and shoulders. Of their champagne they were noisily ostentatious. It was now mid-winter in Buenos Aires; but they were wearing light suits and flashy neckties. Typical Argentine "sports" in short!

The girl, who had so impressed the solitary stranger, was taking no part in the animation around her. Her quiet melancholy shadowed a rather long face, a pair of burning dark eyes, a mouth that might have been called too large. Everything about her

contributed to the tragic attractiveness of her person: the wide hat, which accentuated a child-like quality in her; the elegance, somewhat affectedly careless, of her dress; the relaxed indifference with which she moved her long arms—thin but shapely, and covered, to above the elbow, by white gloves. The low cut of her dress drew one's eye to the faint golden tints of her skin. Her hair, of a dull golden shade, fell in loops over her ears to form a frame for her features.

He observed that she was vainly trying to be merry, and to laugh with her companions; but depression had obstinately seized on her, and she lacked the will to master it. A moment came when her gloom increased to the point of tears, and her companions remarked it. One of them, in whom drink was already at work, cried out:

"What's the matter with you? Have you got the pip?"

He was a graceless individual, ugly, flat-nosed, restless, loud-voiced, constantly gesticulating, whom the others called "the Duck."

His friends greeted this witticism with bursts of laughter. The girl herself forced a smile in which the man at the neighboring table caught something of her suffering. His facial muscles contracted slightly.

"Give her another swig of booze—it's good for what ails her!" bawled the "Duck," inspired by the success of his previous venture.

"Don't mind him, Nacha!" said one of the women coldly, not as much from real sympathy as from a sense of feminine loyalty.

Again there were outbursts of laughter in the group, and even from people at other tables who had begun to listen. The girl, embarrassed, mortified, looked timidly about in every direction. When her eyes met those of the man who was sitting alone her self-consciousness increased.

The orchestra came to the end of a tango and, in the quiet which followed, the members of the *patota* set out to "rag" Nacha. One of them, who seemed to be her "man," egged the others on. The women playfully sided against her. Soon almost all the cabaret was taking part in the game. At last Nacha, unable to endure the banter longer, laid her face in her hands. The "Duck" moaned in burlesque: "Oh, Oh, Oh!" while some of the spectators near by almost unhinged their jaws in a roar of laughter, or chorused with the mourner in ridicule: "Oh, Oh, Oh!"

"See here, you are making a fool of me in public!" exclaimed Nacha's lover—and he added an oath.

Again the orchestra struck up a tango. The languid notes, the limping rhythms, the thick, beelike murmur of the mandola, came to drown both curses and laughter alike. Again the couples were out on the floor, here swinging together in tight embrace, there stilting along with bodies stiffly erect and faces grave.

Nacha's "man" got up to dance with her. When, however, the girl resisted, he lifted her violently in his arms and set her down in the middle of the hall.

"Let me alone! I can't dance. . . ."

"You are going to dance, I tell you. . . . You are only putting on!"

"But don't you see? I can't . . . oh, please!"

The fellow grasped her around the waist and plunged with her into the rhythmic whirl on the floor. The man who sat alone had started at the brutality he was witnessing, as though a question had suddenly been settled in his mind. Something dramatic seemed about to happen, and many eyes watched him uneasily.

Nacha, with no heart for the dance, was not long in freeing herself and returning to the table; now it was quite unoccupied, since all her companions were on the floor. Her escort followed smiling with rage, and sitting down beside her, began apparently to insult and threaten her. His lower jaw was thrown far forward as he spoke; his teeth came tight together, and his lips twisted themselves into all the grimaces expressing anger and contempt.

"You'll pay for this . . . as soon as we get out of here!" he said; and meanwhile he clutched her arm in a grip that hurt.

The stranger was now looking closely at the man. The latter was a tall strapping fellow, stockily built. His wide, close-shaven face showed a scar across the chin. He had broad shoulders, a dark skin; and his small hard eyes glittered with something of an Indian's haughtiness and sinister ferocity. A large pearl adorned his made-up necktie. He wore white spats over his patent leather shoes, and large rings on his fingers.

There are plenty of men like this among the *porteños!* As vulgar as they are rich, they are

always showing off their dollars and their women. They each set up a *ménage* with some pretty girl—for otherwise they would lose "standing." They spend their evenings in the theatres and their nights in the cabarets or, for adventure, ragging with their pals and their sweethearts some convenient victim; drinking champagne, making an uproar, annoying everyone, bellowing at one another. Noisy, aggressive, intrusive, they allow no one to look too pryingly, too persistently, at them! Their right forefingers itch for the feel of a revolver—an appendage that Nature should, to please them, have grown on their right hands. Women, in their eyes, are mechanical toys, objects without human feelings, to be bought and sold as such. And yet women become attached to them; perhaps because they like the manliness that such violence attests; or because these fellows show their women off, give them distinction—of a certain kind. Passion also inclines them to a certain fidelity at times. Some of them moreover are university men, or belong to prominent families. However, they are all office-seekers, all gamblers. They "go across" to Europe occasionally, insulting well-bred people by their arrogance and their grossness as *nouveaux riches*. In Paris they are always accompanied by *cocottes*, and make disturbances in dance halls and cabarets to advertise their South-American spirit and self-sufficiency. A repulsive type, in short: a mixture of the barbarian and of the civilized human being, of the gangster and the respectable citizen. The urban descendent of the Argentine cow-puncher is an in-

dividual without scruples, morals or discipline, with no law but caprice, and no ideal but pleasure.

Meanwhile Nacha, her face in her hands, was weeping. Her tormentor grew angrier, raised his voice to a higher, more resonant pitch, threatened her still more violently, called her hysterical, ridiculous, said she was surely "kidding." Anything would succeed better with him, he shouted, than cry-babying, and putting on. . . . At the single table near by, the stranger was looking on intently, his features tense with silent determination. How much longer could a self-respecting man hold out against the challenge of that brutality?

The rapier-thrust of a violin bow gave the death stab to a dying tango. The *patoteros* and their women returned to their table. The fellow who had wept vociferously before broke out again into mock lamentations at sight of Nacha's tears. He stood up, rubbing his fists into his eyes, and bawling grotesquely, like the dunce in school. His mirth caught the mood of the entire cabaret. Every atom of it quivered in titters of laughter. The butt of all this humor, hardened by this time, was shedding her tears inwardly now. She even feigned indifference, shrugging her shoulders and forcing her lips into an expression of disdain. But the man who was watching saw confessed suffering in her still reddened eyes.

When the next tango crushed this wretched farce under its innumerable feet, another of the *patota's* members, a tall thin youth, with a girlishly slender waist, asked Nacha to dance with him.

"I said I didn't want to dance!"

"What?" Her lover sprang toward her and seized her by the arms, determined to force her to her feet.

"Oh, please! I can't! . . . I can't!"

"What do you mean—'can't'!"

The contest lasted only a second. The man won, inevitably. Pulling the girl out of her chair he dragged her along to the centre of the room, so that his friend could have a dance with her. But in his anger he gave one push so violent that she fell to the floor.

And then something unheard of happened. The man who was alone had risen suddenly at the beginning of the struggle. Now, to the stupefaction of everyone, he stepped coolly forward. The crowd quivered with excitement. A ring of uneasy faces formed around the chief actors in the scene. The tango was broken off; the sombre moan of the mandola was all that remained of it.

"What do you mean?" the girl's lover spat at him, while a leer of primitive hatred flashed in his Indian eyes, now smaller and harder than ever.

The coolness of the intruder amazed the crowd. He faced the fellow calmly and addressed him with apparent indifference. Nothing but a jerking of his lip muscles and a slight trembling of his hands betrayed the indignation in him. He looked steadily at the man in front of him and said slowly:

"You will please stop ill-treating this girl!"

No one could tell whether such coolness were due to foolhardiness or to real courage. The man was of average, if not less than average build, easy picking, obviously, for that semi-Indian and his pals,

who could finish him off in a jiffy, with fists or revolvers, as *patota* preferences and custom might decide. The other members of the party meanwhile stood about in paralyzed amazement that any one should presume to call one of their fellows to account.

"What's that?" the fellow asked, as though he had not heard distinctly.

"Stop illtreating this . . ."

A sudden attack from the four other members of the *patota* cut off the end of his sentence. At the same moment the onlookers discreetly drew back. A chair was knocked over. There was a rush to get out through the narrow doorway.

"Hold on there! Leave this fellow to me!" roared Nacha's owner. The air was dotted for a moment with clenched, up-raised fists. Seeing his friends still hedging the intruder about, their eagerness to attack unappeased, the fellow pushed them back one by one toward their table. Then he wheeled around on the spectators.

"This is nothing to stop dancing for, gentlemen!" To the musicians he shouted: "Go on with the music! Give us a tango!"

The orchestra, which had disintegrated during the scene, assembled around the music-stands again. After a few moments of aimless strumming it began a dance in quick time. The crowd, partly out of respect for the bully, and partly out of anxiety to dance down an incident which, if repeated, could only end in a shooting, began another tango. No one cared to return to a danger once safely passed.

Meanwhile the two men stood facing one another.

"You don't know me!" said the girl's lover at

last, pulling at the rings on his fingers as though to busy his hands, so eager to be at the throat of the man opposite him. "You don't know me—but I know you! You are Dr. Fernando Monsalvat. Well sir, let me give you a suggestion. Leave us alone, and get out of here at once. You are older than I—forty at least. I am only thirty, very fit, and used to these affairs; and my friends are with me, their sleeves rolled up already, you might say. Just go along home! Don't be throwing your life away! And if I give you so much good advice *gratis,* it's because I have my reasons for doing so!"

The fellow's friends looked at one another inquiringly.

Who could that man be? What reasons did their comrade have to prevent them from breaking the presumptuous fool's head? The girl, seated at the table, kept her eyes on her champion. The orchestra was playing a wailing dance, limping with pauses, and mournful with the sighs of the mandola. There were many couples dancing, the women clinging to their partners' necks.

Monsalvat heard the man out in silence. He replied coolly:

"You can keep your advice to yourself! Meantime I want you to stop illtreating that poor girl!"

"That poor girl!"

The fellow took a step backward as though about to "rush" his opponent. Rapidly his eyes took in everything around him. One hand felt for his revolver. But Monsalvat's self-possession held the rowdy in check. Perplexed, and already beaten, he began to feel ridiculous. This man was not trying

to provoke him; neither did he fear him. He saw that the crowd and his companions had not noticed his compromising move; and he decided he could calm down without loss of prestige. Two or three minutes passed. Monsalvat waited as though entrenched in silence and calm. Something emanated from him which quite disconcerted his enemy. The latter lay aside his swaggering and said with a forced sarcastic laugh:

"You know, I am afraid of you! That is why I don't touch you. You are a regular man-eater, you see,—and that makes me spare my friends! I don't want to see them beaten up! . . ."

He stopped short, for his sarcasm quite obviously fell flat, even in his own estimation. He approached Monsalvat, and putting a hand on his shoulder said:

"See here, Monsalvat, it's lucky for you that it was I you ran across here . . . however . . . well . . . never mind all that . . . I'm going to make you see you're wrong. I'm going to let you talk with her. You can ask her any questions you see fit."

He went up to the girl and brought her back to introduce her. Ashen-pale, embarrassed, she smiled an absurd little smile, probably to hide her fear of some fatal outcome to the scene. Her eyes tremulously nestled for a moment in Monsalvat's steady gaze; but the voice of her master drove them from that refuge.

"This gentleman," he guffawed, "thinks I'm a blackguard more or less! Well, I want you to tell him whether you are satisfied with what I do for you or not. Tell him the truth, don't be afraid!"

Monsalvat, charmed and saddened, was still looking at Nacha, though he scarcely saw her. His eyes, softened with a pity intense enough to be pain, were remodelling a truer image of this girl of the underworld. She did not dare look at him. Her eyes were raised to her "man." Her mute question did not, apparently, interest Monsalvat, perhaps because he knew what the answer would be.

"Answer! Are you satisfied?"

"Yes!"

Her voice was scarcely audible.

"And you have an easy time of it! You have a home, haven't you?"

Nacha saw what she must do. She must speak, declare herself satisfied with her lot. To do anything else would be to draw down on herself this man's anger at her champion. So suddenly she began to talk in a torrent of rambling, half-coherent words.

"Yes. I am satisfied. Why not? I have a home. I'm lucky all right. I don't have to chase around here and there the way I did before. And my home is fine. I have all the money I want to spend, and two servants. What more could I ask? And after all I went through before, it's quiet, and safe! You don't know what I went through!"

And, once started, she went on endlessly. She seemed to be talking into space, not addressing anyone in particular, and as if for herself alone, as if to distract her own attention with her own words. All that was not for Monsalvat's ears! She would have preferred that Monsalvat should not hear her at all! The words came out, poured out, beyond

the control of will, much like a somnambulist's chatter. Monsalvat was not listening. It was enough for him to look at her and be conscious of her presence. Her gentleness, the tremulousness of her words, the sadness of her eyes, were what absorbed his whole interest. What she was saying did not matter. The tango throbbing through the air made him the more aware of the despairing monotone of her voice. The mandola with its bitter wail made her tragic melancholy only the more poignant.

Even Nacha's owner seemed for a moment to yield to the strange spell of these combining sounds. Then he interrupted:

"Well! You see? Are you convinced? Didn't I say she was putting on?"

Throwing back his shoulders, he burst into a laugh that rang with contempt. The tango was over, so was its spell.

The bully became the bully again. He approached his sweetheart, pushed her toward his comrades, who were sitting at their table waiting to see how it would all end.

"Now get out of here!" he said, turning to Monsalvat; "but before you go, I'll tell you who I am. It's to your interest, friend—just a moment—we might meet again—take a look at me!"

He was serious now. His right hand slipped through the opening of his tuxedo and rested on his belt. Then he announced solemnly:

"I am Dalmacio Arnedo, 'Pampa Arnedo,' as they call me."

Monsalvat started. Instinctively he raised a

hand, but immediately let it fall. The five of the *patota* made a rush for him. At the same moment someone shouted: "The police!"

The cabaret seethed in confusion. Then suddenly an anxious calm fell on the room, a forced appearance of peaceableness, prearranged for the dull eyes of authority.

From the first there had been among the onlookers a certain number who took sides with Monsalvat. His manner toward the *patota* won him sympathizers. Some of them felt that the man had the strength to support his assurance. The girl herself aroused pity even though no one had had the courage to speak up in her defence. Two or three of these most sympathetic, or most prudent, individuals had called for the police, to have help on hand in case of an outbreak from the rowdies.

As the alarm was given the members of the *patota* hurried back to their places. Monsalvat, facing Arnedo, exclaimed:

"You rotter!"

Pampa Arnedo, safely seated at his table, answered with a sinister smile, while his friends beside him made noises with their lips, grimaced, and began offering toasts, simulating exaggerated merriment. Nacha looked pityingly at her protector. Who was this man? What did he want of her?

The police after a rapid glance around the room decided that "law and order" were still quite intact, and with solemn prudence went out again. Monsalvat returned to his table and paid his reckoning. The Duck began to sing the well-known tune from

a popular variety show: "He's going now, he's going now! . . ."

The other members of the *patota,* and even some neutrals, joined in the chorus, "Now, now, he's going now!" Monsalvat, as he got up, saw that the girl, too, was singing and laughing. He paused a moment, reproachfully it seemed, his eyes dimmed with tears. Then quietly, without haste, he left the cabaret, while the fellow who had burlesqued Nacha's weeping broke out again with his "Oh, oh, oh!"

CHAPTER II

MONSALVAT had come to a crossroad in his life. For nearly forty years he had gone straight ahead, never hesitating as to which turning to take. But now, as though a complete transformation had occurred within him, he seemed a stranger to himself, and he did not know where this stranger was going.

Heretofore he had lived without criticizing the world of which he was a part—which means that he had been fairly happy. But during the past few months he had come to view life and himself from a critical point of view, and he had reached the conclusion that as human beings go, he was one of the unfortunates.

He and his sister Eugenia were illegitimate children. His father, of the aristocracy, and rich with many millions, had, some five years before, died suddenly without leaving a will. Fernando was intelligent and had something of his father's manner and bearing; and as the legitimate heirs of the Monsalvat fortune were all girls, Fernando was given a good education while his father was still alive. In order to keep him away from his mother, an ignorant, irresponsible woman of the immigrant class, the boy was sent to a boarding school. It was only during vacations that he saw her. Fernando

remembered his father's visits, the discussions with his mother, the admonitions he himself always received. Once his father had taken the boy to one of his ranches near Buenos Aires, a piece of property as big as an entire state, on which were marvelous forests, a house as magnificent as a palace, and paddocks full of splendid bulls and woolly sheep. More clearly than anything else, he remembered how his father took him along almost stealthily, and replied evasively when a friend, on the train, asked who the child with him was. Later, at boarding school, some boys who knew his father's legitimate family, enlightened him as to his own birth.

When he left college he took up law. He was an excellent student; and even before any regular admission to the bar, he was filling a place in the office of a well-known lawyer. Later he became this man's partner, made money, and won recognition. For a scruple he left the law office and went to Europe, remaining there two years. When he returned he was thirty-two. No longer wishing to continue in his profession, he finally obtained a consulship to an Italian city. It was now six months since he had returned, after seven years' absence, to settle permanently in his own country.

Fernando's mother was still living. She was ill, and aged; indeed, although not yet seventy, she seemed quite decrepit. Her son saw little of her. She lived with a mulatto servant in a rather poor neighborhood, in an apartment house facing Lezama Park. Of his own sister he had seen little.

Monsalvat had lived as do most decent men of his social position. He had worked hard in his law

office, and as consul had rendered services of distinction. From boyhood, books had been his chief companions. He had taken up sociology, and from time to time he got an article published. His opinions were respected and discussed in certain intellectual circles. Though not socially inclined, and in spite of his timidity and lack of confidence, he frequented the clubs and theatres and race courses of Buenos Aires. He was not often present at more private social affairs, for the circumstances of his birth prevented his receiving invitations from certain quarters. While a student he lived on an allowance from his father. Now, on his return from Europe, he found himself possessed of no other income than three hundred *pesos* monthly from a piece of property which his father had given him upon his passing his law examinations.

The knowledge of his illegitimacy had exercised an incalculable influence on his character and general outlook on life. When he was a student certain youths of good family had made it plain that they did not desire his friendship; and later he had been socially snubbed on several occasions. He was, however, inclined to exaggerate the number of these slights. If an acquaintance failed to notice him, as he passed along the street, he believed the omission an intentional offense. If, at a dance, a girl chanced to refuse his proffered arm, he was beset always with the same thought . . . "She does not care to be seen with me. . . . She knows! . . ." If he received in his examinations a lower mark than the one he thought he must have earned, he did not for a moment doubt that it was the stigma of his birth

which was to blame. Not a day passed that he did not at some moment revert to this preoccupation. He bore society no grudge; on the contrary, it seemed to him quite natural that, dominant ideas being what they are, he should be thought less of. Nevertheless he felt humiliated, with a vague consciousness that his value as a social being was diminished by a misfortune beyond his control.

All this, of course, tended to isolate him, and confirmed his tendencies toward bookishness. He had no real friends. He felt himself to be quite alone in life—alone spiritually, that is; for social relations in abundance could not fail a man of his intellect and professional position, whose character, moreover, was above reproach, and who, in spite of an outward coldness and an almost savage shyness that frequently took possession of him, was a kind and likeable sort of fellow.

This sense of solitude was tempered, if at all, by one or two experiences in love. His dealings with women were not those current among the young men of his generation. Gossip attributed, nevertheless, sentimental affairs to him, some of them with women of prominence in the life of the Capital. For Monsalvat, as his acquaintances noted, knew how to please. There was something that appealed to women in the soft inflections of his voice, and in the deep seriousness of his eyes. But the secret of his successes probably lay in the fact that he awakened in women that compassion which is so ruinous to them—so much so that Monsalvat was quite as often the pursued as the pursuer. Two or three times he had thought himself in love—mistakenly,

as he soon discovered; and women for their part had loved him, and with passion. But these affairs were, after all, nothing but passing gratifications of the instinct of playfulness—little love episodes at best.

In other respects his life might have been considered a model and an exception. He was courteous and simple in manner, with no violent dislikes for anyone. Kind, always ready to do a good turn, he pushed considerateness even to extremes. He lived scrupulously within his means. He never paid court to those in whose power it was to further his advancement. He never indulged in petty disloyalties toward his friends nor paid off injury with injury. His relations with people were always sincere and free from intrigue. A useful and an honest fellow Fernando Monsalvat might have been considered by anyone. Yet, these several months past, he had been coming to the conclusion that he had lived in a useless sort of way, that his life had been selfish, mediocre, barren of any good. He was most of all ashamed of his articles on moral and social subjects, all of them colored with "class" prejudice, mere reflections of the conventional, insincere, and rankly individualistic standards which pervaded the University, and which never failed of approval from climbing politicians as well as from the cultured *élite*. Monsalvat despised himself for having lived and thought like any other man of his social group. What real good had he ever accomplished? He had lived for himself alone; worked for the money that work might bring him; written to gratify an instinct of vanity, a desire for prominence, for ap-

plause. Now he endured a hidden torment: he was disgusted with himself, with society, and even with life, repenting, in his soul's secret, of so many wasted years.

To generous spirits, such moral crises are natural; moments are sure to come when they must view their own conduct critically; and at such junctures they loathe their sterile past. But how many ever succeed in changing the direction of their lives? Most of us stifle this moral unrest in the depths of our consciousness; discontented and pessimistic, we go on living a life we hate, tempering the noble impulses that beset our guilty consciences with considerations of personal, even petty, interests that bid us take things as we find them. This latter was the case with Monsalvat.

Two trifling events of his days in Paris had cast a gloom over his outlook on life.

Convinced that he ought to put an end to his solitude, he decided to marry; and he paid court to a girl of good family with whom he had been on pleasantly cordial terms in Rome. But no sooner did the family and the girl herself become aware of Monsalvat's intentions, than all friendliness on their part vanished. An officious friend intimated to Monsalvat—he never knew whether at the girl's own request, or that of her parents—that his attentions were not desired.

Later, at the hotel where he was stopping, he made the acquaintance of another fellow countrywoman. Friendship and flirtation followed. Monsalvat became interested to the point of believing himself in love. He made an offer of marriage and

was contemptuously rejected, as though such an idea on his part were in itself an insult. In situations of this kind Monsalvat did not suffer so much on his own account; it was not shame of being what he was that hurt him, but a deepening sense of the injustice inherent in people and in things.

He had given barely a thought to the imperfection, the inequalities, of the world he was living in. Full of his own thoughts, his own books, his own pleasures, he had paid no attention to the cry of anguish rising from the depths of the social order —as an established, an immutable order he had accepted it all along.

The fact that not till he had felt them himself had he opened his eyes to the flagrant injustices of society aroused a deep self-reproach in Monsalvat. It seemed to him that at the bottom of his new opinions purely selfish motives lay. On the other hand, it was to the universal, the human aspects of his own case that he gave his attention. Besides, does not selfishness play a little part in our striving toward the greatest ends?

It was some six months before the scenes in the cabaret, that Fernando Monsalvat, disheartened and disillusioned, had arrived in Buenos Aires. At first it startled him to find himself judging people and institutions so mercilessly. Why did he see everything in its darkest colors? Had he become an incorrigible cynic? Eventually he came to understand that the severe judgments he was formulating were the natural consequence of the critical spirit now aroused within him. In the complex motivation of the finest, noblest, most heroic gestures of men, how

many small, unconfessable impulses always have their play?

One afternoon chance revealed to him in vivid colors the degree to which his life had been self-centered. The taxi in which he happened to be riding came to a standstill at a turning in Lavalle Square. A crowd was coming toward him, singing. It was a Sunday afternoon. He noticed that all the doors of the neighborhood were closed. The singing came nearer, swelling up from the street, rising above the tree tops. It was an irritated, exasperated, tumultuous mob which was approaching; and a song which both alarmed and attracted him was resounding from hundreds of mouths, its spirit typified in the red flag waving above the multitude. He got out of the taxi, and at that moment a bugle sounded. The mob fell in on itself like a punctured balloon. There was a volley of rifle shots, and in the confusion he could see the police charging blindly with their swords. The song continued, however, for a time; then the regimented violence of the Law was stronger than the impulsive violence of the *Internationale.* The rabble broke into the side streets and dispersed. The swords of the police eagerly sought out the wretches crouching for shelter in the doorways. Other wretches were in headlong flight, their eyes wide with terror. No one was paying any attention to the dead or wounded. Doors and windows remained closed and silent. To Monsalvat, sick with indignation, his soul flaming in outrage, this very silence seemed a horrible complicity in a crime.

His transformation, however, was purely an in-

ner one. To be sure, he had somewhat changed his manner of living: he no longer went to his club nor to parties; he avoided most of his former friends. But, after all, what had he actually done these six months past? Had he perchance even discovered the road he really wanted to take? He was ceaselessly tormented by these questions, which plunged him for hours at a time into inconclusive meditations.

On one point he was resolved: he would not resume his practice of law. What need had he to earn money? To save it up? To spend it on amusements? At any rate, he might give it away. But to whom, and how? A friend, a successful lawyer, who had a high opinion of Monsalvat's judicial learning, proposed making him a partner in his firm; but Monsalvat did not accept the offer. He thought, finally, he would prefer a clerkship in the Department of Foreign Relations, where his seven years as consul would count, and where, too, he was already looked upon with great favor. The Minister had promised him a post and the appointment would be coming along almost any day.

Meanwhile he roamed the streets, gloomy and preoccupied, fleeing from his acquaintances and the Centennial festivities of the fashionable quarters to wander through the tenement districts and the slums. Sometimes he would join the spectators of some street entertainment; and as he listened to the talk of those about him, or spoke to them, men and women, it surprised him to feel suddenly so much at home with these poor people, so at one with them; till he remembered that through his mother—born

of laborers who had worked their way up to the shopkeeping class—he, too, was *pueblo,* very much *pueblo,* a true child of the proletariat.

One day he went to see the building—a small tenement—on the income from which he was living. The house was a loathsome plague-spot in which some fifteen wretched families lodged. How was it that it had never before occurred to him to look this house up, he wondered, disgusted with himself. And why had his agent never reported such conditions? Then he remembered that he had visited the property in person several times before his second trip to Europe; save that then all this poverty and squalor seemed to him a natural, even an excellent, thing! Was it not just this sort of surroundings which pricked the ambition of these laboring people, spurred them to work their way up to the comfort they had learned through hard experience to appreciate? Was not this very misery the first rung on the ladder of progress in this blessed country of opportunity, where "no one need be poor unless he chooses to be"? Monsalvat thought with shame of his earlier adherence to "economic liberalism," a toothless theory, surely invented by the rich that they might continue to exploit the poor! How much he would have given now never to have written those fine articles of his! He went away resolved to mortgage the tenement, and put the money into improvements which would make the building sanitary at least.

The people of his old world, his men friends especially, made fun of his new views. He had not been talking much of his recent mental struggles;

but his aloofness, coupled with a few articles of his giving voice to the protest within him, annoyed not a few of the distinguished persons who had been wont to applaud him. Something had gone wrong inside this man; and society commented on the change without forebearance. Some said he was crazy, others thought there was something off with his liver or his spleen. More than one of his old admirers looked at him with a kind of fear. What was he going to do next? Perhaps break with all established institutions.

Monsalvat, however, was nobody's enemy. Feelings of revolt could not live long in his heart, but became transformed, soon after birth, into a nameless anguish, a physical and moral uneasiness. He hated only himself. His rebellion was a rebellion only against his own selfish years.

What was it he wanted now? What was he looking for? What road was he going to choose? He did not know. Around him he felt a great emptiness that was ever growing greater. Wherever he went a sense of infinite loneliness accompanied him. He spent hours pondering the future. Meanwhile he had grown strangely sensitive emotionally; and it seemed as though the moment had come when his outward life, as well, must undergo its transformation.

One night idle curiosity led him to a cabaret. He knew little of this form of diversion. The "show" entertained him; the tangos and the orchestra stirred his emotions. This place of amusement seemed to be a note of color in the bleak immensity of Buenos Aires. On the other hand, he felt more alone than

ever before. In all that dancing, in all that music, he found, he scarcely knew why, the same sadness which was in his soul. At times when the mandola wailed in a crescendo from the depth of some vulgar popular tune—fraught with all the coarseness and abjections of the tenements of the city—he seemed to hear in it a cry of loneliness, despair, and bitterness rising from the dregs of life itself.

It was on that night that his eyes first met Nacha's. They looked at one another with surprise, and with a shade of embarrassment, as though they knew one another. The girl lost her composure, lowered her eyes, twisted her fingers nervously. For two hours Monsalvat lingered in the cabaret, persisting in this flirtation. He did not understand why he had never liked loose women; indeed, it all seemed to him rather absurd—though the girl did have pretty eyes! Perhaps she was not what she seemed! Perhaps she might some day love him, chance permitting. Perhaps his loneliness would be more bearable if a woman like her were there to sympathize with him. When she left the cabaret, he followed in a taxi. With her companion, she went into a house. Monsalvat concluded that she lived there. He got out of the taxi, and loitered about in the middle of the dark street. She came out on the balcony for a moment, casting two or three rapid glances in his direction.

A few nights later Monsalvat returned to the cabaret. He did not find her there. His loneliness again became unbearably acute, and his restlessness intolerable. It seemed to him more than ever

imperative that he find some purpose in life again, some clear comprehension of his mission and destiny.

A few days later the scene in the cabaret occurred.

CHAPTER III

IT was one o'clock when Monsalvat came out of the cabaret. As he stepped out on the sidewalk the cold, waiting thieflike at the door, leapt at his throat and face. He turned up the collar of his overcoat and walked slowly away, careless of direction, his eyes following the sidewalk in front of him as a wheel follows a groove.

At the first street corner he paused. People were leaving theatres and cafés, whirling away into the dark in taxis and automobiles. The trams were crowded. The cross-streets, of unpretentious apartment houses and second-rate shops, all darkened and asleep, were poorly lighted; but at its southern end, the center of the capital's night life dusted the sky with a golden sheen. Monsalvat turned in that direction, walking on mechanically till he came out on the brilliantly illuminated avenue. Through the immense plate glass windows of the cafés he could see the multitudes of little tables, and topping them, hundreds of human torsos gesticulating under thick waves of cigarette smoke, pierced with colored lights; while through the opening and closing doors, tango music broke in irregular surges, now strong, now weak. The street corners were sprinkled with men stragglers or survivors from larger groups of joy-seekers. Automobile horns, conversations in every tongue, the bells of blocked street cars, rent

the lurid glow with resounding, impatient clangor. But in spite of all the animation and illumination of the theatre district, the merry-making had not the enthusiasm of the earlier hours. Only that irreducible minimum of vitality remained, that residue of joy-thirst, which survives evenings of revelry, clinging tenaciously to the later hours, and scattering over the after-midnight streets a pervading sense of weariness.

Indifferent to the animation of these glittering thoroughfares, concentrated on his own inner misery, bewildered in the maze of conflicting emotions within him, Monsalvat went on his way, but walking more and more slowly now. He tried to analyze the thoughts and sensations that were tormenting him; but the effort served only to exasperate his distress. He had never suffered like this. All he knew for the moment was that his heart, with an impulsiveness which he felt certain was quite disinterested, had gone out to a girl he saw doomed, the victim of her own will to live and of the evil nature of others. How cowardly, futile, he had felt himself in the presence of her helplessness and humiliation! And then something overwhelming, imperious, had seemed to stir in his being, filling him with a courage strangely unfamiliar to him, lifting him from his chair, and throwing him forward against the girl's tormentors. But had he not played the simple fool—in public? Had not even Nacha joined in the mockery as he left the room, proving incapable of loyalty even toward the man who had defended her? Then that final thrust of the bully: "Take a good look at me! I am Dalmacio Arnedo! Pampa

Arnedo!" In the days of his thoughtless prosperity as a student and man of promise, Fernando had thought little of the sister, Eugenia Monsalvat, who shared his own position in his father's family. A touch of shame and sorrow had come to him when he learned that she had left her—and his—mother's home—disappearing from even that penumbra of respectability, to live as the mistress of a man named Arnedo. So this was the man, thus crossing his path a second time, rising before him leering and insulting, and pronouncing his own name as a symbol of redoubled scorn for the name of Monsalvat! And that sister, again! Had he done anything to prevent her fall, in the first place, or to redeem her, now that she had fallen?

He was still walking slowly down the avenue of white lights when he felt a touch on his arm. It was Hamilcar Torres, one of the most intimate of his few intimate acquaintances.

"Give me a few moments, Monsalvat. Let's go in here, shall we?"

They entered one of the large cafés. The orchestra here, composed of girls, was playing a languid gypsy waltz, the music and the musicians, in combination, evoking expressions of melting languor on the faces of the males who were assembled there, most of them, at this advanced hour, gazing about in stupid rapture over wine glasses that were being filled and filled again.

"It was I who sent for the police," said Torres, when they had taken a table. He brought out the words very deliberately, marking the syllables, and in a tone calculated to emphasize the allusion,

though his manner at once changed from a mood of reproving seriousness to one of amusement, and bantering knowingness.

Torres was a physician; his strikingly white teeth, crisp curly hair, eyebrows prominent over deep-set black eyes, suggested a trace of African blood in his veins. Under a thick black mustache, rather handsomely set against rosy, smooth-shaven cheeks, he smiled continuously, sometimes sadly, sometimes ironically, sometimes with affected malevolence and shrewdness.

Monsalvat did not reply. The doctor, turning sideways to the table, crossed his long legs, and, thrusting them far beyond the limits of the space which might reasonably be allowed to each patron of the café, obstructed all passage near him.

"I followed along after you," he said, shifting uneasily on his chair and turning his head so as to face Monsalvat, "because I wanted to put you on your guard. You've got to be careful with these people, old man! I know them—they won't stop at anything—and I saw that you . . . and the girl . . . well . . . er . . . eh?"

His right finger pointed, on the query, to his own right eye, then he waggled it at Monsalvat. Again his face varied from a rather exaggerated severity to a knowing smile; and turning his head so that it was once more in line with his body, and he had to look sideways at Monsalvat, he added:

"No need to deny it, my boy! After all, the girl is pretty enough! But—be careful. . . . When women like that get a hold of a fellow . . .!"

"Aren't you putting it rather strongly, Torres?

I have a feeling that this particular girl is not of just the kind that . . ."

"Just the kind that what?" snapped the doctor, still eyeing Fernando sidewise, and with a mocking smile. "You don't know her!"

Then facing Monsalvat, and mustering a choleric frown for the occasion, he added impressively in a mysterious and earnest tone of voice, as if revealing something from a transcendental source:

"More than one man has gone to the dogs on that girl's account!"

Whereupon, with an air of philosophical indifference, he settled back to his former comfortable position.

Monsalvat was not convinced. Nacha's gentle eyes seemed to refute the miserable innuendos Torres was making. And yet, supposing it were all true? What then? A wave of passionate curiosity swept over Monsalvat. He wanted to know more. He must know more! Yet he said nothing. He could not bring out the question that was hanging on his lips. Torres divined what his friend was thinking, and pleased to be able to show how intimately he knew the ins and outs of life in Buenos Aires, he began:

"This Arnedo fellow—Pampa, as they call him—is real low-life, the kind who wouldn't hesitate to put a bullet through your body, or forge your name. Two or three times he has come near going to jail. And you saw how he treats the girl! An out and out bully!"

"What's her name? Who is she?" interrupted Monsalvat, with ill-concealed eagerness.

"She's known as Lila about town; but her real name is Ignacia Regules—Nacha, as most people call her for short. Her mother kept a student's boarding house—still does, for that matter. I knew her mother . . . because once . . ."

"Keep to Nacha, won't you?"

"I see; you want to hear all about the girl! That's the important subject!" The doctor looked slyly at Monsalvat, enjoying the latter's confusion at this sudden self-betrayal. "I'll tell you something of what I know—not all, of course. I'm obliged to keep the most interesting parts to myself. Well, this Nacha, while still living in her mother's boarding house, fell in love with a student and ran away with him. He kept her a couple of years or so; then he left her, and at a very critical juncture —she was in the hospital, with a child that, fortunately, did not live. When she came out she took a job in a store. Probably she was willing enough to live a decent life, but the bad example of some of her girl friends was too much for her. She began to earn ten times more than what she got in the store—in a different way."

Torres winked as he now looked at Monsalvat.

"And how do you know all this?" the latter inquired.

"My dear fellow, that is something I don't tell."

The doctor did not wish to modify the effect of his story by simply stating that Nacha had known a friend of his, and once, when she was ill and Torres had been attending her, she had given him her whole story. Torres enjoyed mystification for

its own sake, and preferred, just for the fun of it, to keep Monsalvat on edge a little longer.

And this game, for that matter, was working well. In utter distress, Monsalvat stared fixedly, now at his friend, now at the orchestra, now at the unknown faces about the great hall. But he did not see what was before his eyes. His mind was filled with the image of his own sister, abandoned to misfortune, perhaps now a common woman of the streets; of his mother weeping her life out over her own and her daughter's shame; of Nacha Regules, caught in the brutal clutches of Pampa Arnedo; and finally of his own past self, happy, free to travel, flirting with handsome women, courting literary fame, lounging at his club, or attending fashionable parties! While he had been idling thoughtlessly along in this relative but still gilded luxury, Eugenia Monsalvat was falling lower and lower in the social scale! His sister! But not his sister, only! Millions of women were enduring a misery like hers! And a world of well-nourished, "successful" men and women went gaily on its way, indifferent to the ceaseless suffering of these other women, proud of its money, and its easy virtue, robbing the poor of sisters and daughters, buying them, corrupting them, enjoying life.

"And then?" asked Monsalvat, noticing that Torres was studying him, and eager to learn everything he could about the life of this girl, who seemed to him at that moment to represent all the unfortunate women of the earth in her person.

"Well, she left the store—you would never guess why! She wanted to be 'respectable'! She took up

some kind of work, I forget what; but eventually she drifted into a café, as a waitress. Can you imagine 'respectable'—and a café waitress!"

Monsalvat, more and more irritated at his companion's flippancy, suggested that these attempts of Nacha to work and to be "respectable" were certainly nothing against her. She might be a good girl, after all!

"Good? Of course! These girls are all good—almost all, at least. We do judge them harshly, I realize. If they do wrong, it is without knowing exactly that it is wrong. And some of them really have a high moral code—for instance . . ."

Torres was not smiling now. Memories of the numberless poor creatures he had known, memories of extraordinary cases of generosity, and loyalty, and even heroism, for the moment drove his superficial cynicism from him.

Monsalvat was not interested however, obsessed as he was by the image of Nacha, who seemed to be appealing to him to rescue her. And rescue her he would! He would save her from her present tragic situation, from fearful hours awaiting her in the future, and from the memory of frightful hours of the past. An idea that he must see her, speak to her again, somehow, somewhere, took possession of him. But how? And where? And supposing he should meet her again? What would he say to her? He did not know; but his determination was not shaken on that account. He would see her—and save her; not for her own sake, nor because he was himself an "unfortunate" in society; nor because she was beautiful, and his eyes had dwelt upon her; but for

love of his sister rather, for the sake of his own real self!

"These poor girls are simply victims of conditions, I suppose," continued Torres. "Nacha told me once that wherever she went, in shops, or workrooms, or business offices, the men were after her. And it's true, isn't it? We men, even the best of us, are a bad lot. I'd like to know how a girl who hasn't enough to eat, and who lives in the worst sort of surroundings, can resist temptation, especially when it comes in the form of a good-looking fellow who offers to take her out of the hell she is living in. . . . No, they are not to blame. . . ."

Meanwhile the "Merry Widow" waltz floated languidly through the thick air of the café like a maze of shimmering diaphanous silk or impalpable tulle. But to Monsalvat it seemed that this music was winding itself about him, body and soul, a merciless bandage which bound him tighter and tighter, treacherously increasing the pain it promised to soothe. The sadness dwelling at the core of all worldly pleasures fell from each musical phrase, each bar, each note, on the heavy air of the café. Music in such places as this always distressed Monsalvat. Tonight his whole being was an open wound, over which the ceaselessly moving grind of the music grated until he wondered that he did not scream with pain. Was his own record absolutely clean? Had he, too, not bought favors from women—be it, indeed, with flattery and favors returned? And where were those women now?

Had they, too, by selling themselves, lost all right to the world's respect, the right to be treated as

human beings, to be pitied? His fault? He despised himself utterly. Only the violence of his self-reproach gave him the strength to bear his pain.

"And then what?" he queried, rousing himself from his abstraction.

Torres, who had been silent for a time, now answered the question that came almost mechanically from Monsalvat's lips, and told all he knew of Nacha's history. Outstanding in her checkered career had been her love affair with the young poet, Carlos Riga. Together they had endured the most frightful poverty in the Argentine bohemia. Nacha had left him finally, driven away by sheer hunger—and the thought that perhaps her being always with him was an unjust burden on her penniless lover. In these circumstances she'd concluded that it was no use trying to be a "decent" girl; and she had gone off "on her own," taking up with a man—who was soon followed by another—better able to support her. One day the idea came into her head that exclusive devotion to any one protector meant a sort of unfaithfulness to Riga, whom she really adored. From that moment she gave herself up to the roving life of the cabarets and places of amusement. It was during this time that she met Arnedo. He found her pretty, intelligent, admired the ease of manner she had acquired in her mother's boarding house, was impressed by the smatterings of culture she had absorbed from Riga and other young writers she had known in Riga's company—in short, decided that Nacha was the jewel he was looking for—a girl he could "flash" on Capitol sportdom,

and "show off" as his "woman" among people appreciative of such display.

"A horrible story!" exclaimed Monsalvat, gloomily. "Can there be many girls like that?"

"Thousands of them. And I really know something about it. . . . I have long been a police physician. My dissertation was on that very subject!" And he lectured at length on the theme, sparing no details of the traffic which has made Buenos Aires famous as a market of human flesh.

Monsalvat could not speak meanwhile. He was thinking of his sister, trying to picture to himself what her lot must be. He saw her in the abandonment that followed her disgrace, struggling not to lose her grip on life, failing, struggling again to evade the deeper degradations of the outcast she saw below her; and finally sinking in the loathsome mire, dragged into its depths, by a trader's claws, perhaps, tortured, enslaved, and—who could say!——dead! He listened with speechless intentness. "What a ghastly nightmare this world is!" He stammered at last:

"And what is being done to remedy all this?"

"What is there to do, my dear fellow? We would have to destroy everything and construct society anew!"

At these words Monsalvat seized his friend's arm with violence; his eyes were moist with emotion and his voice rang with a strange solemnity, as he said slowly:

"Exactly! Exactly! Well, everything is being destroyed, and a new society is coming into being!"

Torres assented, as far as his facial muscles were

concerned, responding to the suggestiveness of Monsalvat's moral earnestness, to the emotion which his friend's vision of a great and approaching Good stirred in his own sluggish depths. He even went so far as to nod. . . . Then came reaction. His inner, his real self recovered from the momentary spell of Monsalvat's ingenuous and lyric optimism. One look about at the café's noisy and drunken hilarity, and the man of generous instincts disappeared, giving place again to the man of the world, the man like any other man, stamped with all the ideas and sentiments of his kind. To Torres the words Monsalvat had spoken, his Quixotic theories, his grief over things that were not only irremediable and accepted, but even sanctioned, and necessary, began to appear ridiculous, and speaking as a doctor, trained to seek the origin of all human abnormalities in overstrung nerves and disturbed physical or mental equilibrium, he replied lightly and skeptically as before:

"The problem, you see, is too complex . . . there is no solution really. . . ."

Monsalvat did not hear him. Another voice was filling his ears, a voice from a thousand throats, convicting him of his own responsibility, too, for the world's crimes. His heart seemed to him a mournful, hollow, and despairing bell; his eyes saw the world as a scene ready set for tragedy—the tragedy, first, of his mother, deceived, suffering all her life, and handing on suffering to her children; then his sister's; then Nacha's. In an eternal chorus of tears rose the lamentations of the lost women of the earth, the weeping of their parents, their brothers;

the cries of the children they were driven to destroy; their own screams of shame, and clamorings of hunger.

"Why, man, what's the matter with you?" asked Torres finally. "Hadn't we better be going? It's three o'clock."

Monsalvat nodded and got up. He took leave of Torres at once, on the pretext he did not feel well, and started off for the South End, toward the *Avenida de Mayo,* where he lived.

He went to bed at once upon reaching his rooms. But he could not sleep. He did not know why it was; but the sound of the shots that had brought down some of the human creatures in the mob at Lavalle Square, and the song they had sung, became interwoven with one of the cabaret tangos he had just been hearing. This strange music haunted his ears and drove sleep far from him. Later, when he had fallen into a kind of half slumber, there came towards him a procession of frightful figures, howling and groaning louder and louder as they approached; and he knew that this procession was Humanity. It was already dawn when he began to sleep—uneasily and for only a little while. But even this semblance of slumber brought with it a nightmare. A monstrous phantom, covered with gold, silks, and precious stones, its jaws those of an apocalyptic beast, its claws, too, dripping blood, was there before him, in his room, although scarcely contained by it. The monster approached his bed, showing its fangs, about to devour him; and this monster, with its charnel house of a belly, where

lay countless generations of the world's unfortunates, was Injustice.

Monsalvat got up late. He was quiet now. At last there was new life within him. Everything had new life, new meaning. What this new life was he could not have said. But he knew that within him there was now a sense of clearness where before there had been nothing but confusion and obscurity.

He breakfasted and went out, thinking, rather vaguely, that he would go to his mother's. But, as he walked on, he turned in another direction. Moving absent-mindedly, yielding to a new sweet sense of inner calm, he seemed not to notice the streets along which he passed. When he came to himself, he noted that he was within a few yards of Nacha's house. Without hesitating, certain now that he was doing the right thing, he went up the steps and rang the bell.

CHAPTER IV

NACHA had not been able to sleep. Rarely, even in her unhappy life, had she spent so bad a night. On arriving home from the cabaret, Arnedo had gone to bed in silence. This Indian-like taciturnity of his always terrified her. Dread of the man's violence, fear of being once more abandoned, and forced to return to her former precarious circumstances, mingled with the anxieties the day had brought her. Carlos Riga, she had only that morning learned, was dying in a hospital ward. Yet curiously, what tortured her more than grief for her former lover or fear for her own life, was the uneasiness aroused within her by the memory of how she had treated that unknown man who had so chivalrously come to her defense in the cabaret. He had been ready to risk his life for her, and she had rewarded him with a laugh, a laugh half of fear, half of distraction; but to him it must have seemed one of treacherous mockery.

Into her heart that night a new, a strangely engrossing uneasiness had come, a presentiment which she could not have explained, but which she knew she must conceal from Arnedo as though it were a crime. It was a sense of impending evil, an accumulation of forebodings—reminiscences that the news of Riga's condition had brought up, memories

of the evening itself; bits of her own past; pictures, which her frightened imagination painted, of a terrible future—a future with at best such poor, such ill-nourished, such unsubstantial hopes—all blending into a vague conviction that Fate had decreed some great misfortune for her.

How she longed for the relief of slumber! She would need to look fresh and happy when she faced Arnedo the following day. This preoccupation filled her insomnia with a sort of hectic frenzy.

To destroy all traces of the hours of torment she was enduring, she imagined herself digging little graves for them, and burying them one by one under a dust of forgetfulness. Meanwhile, in her desire for the dawn, she turned on the light every few minutes to see what time it was. Four o'clock, half-past four, five! Never had a night lasted so long! She thought the clock must be slow, and got up to see if there were any signs of coming day. Darkness was still unbroken. Only a faint glow in the depths of the sky seemed to presage the possibility of morning. How she hungered for light in that overwhelming darkness!

And meanwhile the image of the man in the cabaret haunted her. He looked at her so strangely! No one else had ever looked at her in just this fashion. There was not in his eyes that desire which she saw in the eyes of other men. It was something else, something else! Especially from the moment when all the café had turned on her! Why had he gazed at her so persistently? A few nights before, in this same cabaret, her eyes had met those of this man. She had not been able to

keep from looking at him; she had not been able to avoid his gaze when he looked her way. And then he had followed her home—doubtless to find out where she lived. She had seen him lingering there in the street and had stepped out on the balcony for a moment. . . . Who was he? Did he want to take her from Arnedo, to have her for himself? Why should he wish to defend her when his doing so could only injure her? He was to blame, in large measure, for Pampa's bad humor. As for Pampa, she hated him; but she could not leave him. He had broken her spirit. He could insult her and knock her about; but instead of turning against him, she would become more submissive and obedient than before. Why? How strange life was! She would never understand herself. At times it seemed as though another being dwelt within, forcing her to do things she could not otherwise account for. Why else, for example, should she have behaved so meanly, so contemptibly, towards this man who had defended her; who, clearly, was interested in her; who was, perhaps, in love with her? Why? Why? That whole long night she had tried not to think of this stranger; but to no avail. There was something about the way he held himself, something in his eyes, and in the words he spoke, which set him apart from everyone else she knew. And this distinction fascinated her. With what spirit he had faced that hostile gang! Something was drawing her towards him. It would frighten her to meet him again—yet she longed for just such an encounter. Why should she want to see him? She did not know! She refused to know!

Only the memory of the poet who had been her lover softened the pain of that unending night. He at least was good! He was loyal! He was compassionate! His heart knew the most beautiful words in the world with which to console; he had developed her intelligence, taught her to bow her head to irremediable injustice. Only this, perhaps, had saved her from the hard, cynical desperation of other women who had, like her, been overcome by wrong. And now he was dying. He was perhaps already dead. She had seen a report of his illness in a newspaper the night before; and the shock of it had left her helpless to disguise the sadness which possessed her as she sat with the others in the cabaret.

She felt responsible in a certain way for Riga's death. Had she not abandoned him at the very moment when he most needed her support? And why had she behaved so? Why was there this incessant contradiction in her life? She had run away from home at the very time when she had become most attached to her mother and her sister. She had loved Riga passionately, and she had fled from him. She felt sympathy and admiration for the man in the cabaret, and she had mocked him. Why did she always act in this unaccountable way? Then Riga took entire possession of her thoughts, and she lived over again the time that had elapsed between their first meeting and her tragic abandonment of him.

It was in her mother's boarding house that they had begun their friendship. Later, after her misfortune, she learned of the poet's difficulties. Sur-

rounded as she was by gross, vulgar people, she thought of him as a noble and pure spirit. Years later, when she was working as a waitress in a café, she met him again. They saw one another several times, compared their troubles, were touched by each other's sufferings. So they went to live together. This union lasted three years; and in the midst of poverty, grief and despair, they came to adore one another. They both worked hard; but Destiny seemed bent on sucking their blood. As their circumstances became poorer and poorer, Riga took refuge in drink and stopped writing. She had gone hungry, taking the bread from her own mouth to feed him, to keep him alive. But a day came when she had no more reserves of courage. She had endured all she could. Life and youth cried out for their rights; and she went away, exhausted physically and morally, weeping out all the remaining strength of her broken heart.

A little before seven o'clock, taking care not to waken Arnedo, she got out of bed again, and tiptoed to the door of the apartment, stepped out to the elevator and rang the bell. When the car came up she asked for the *Patria,* the newspaper to which Arnedo subscribed. The postman had not yet delivered the mail and Nacha sent the boy out to get the paper. While waiting for him to come back she walked restlessly back and forth, from the window opening on the street, to the front door. It was a dull, oppressive, cloudy morning; the sky had a yellowish, dirty look. The air was very damp and on the window-panes and outside woodwork large drops of moisture hung. Nacha had a pain-

ful presentiment. Certainly such a day could bring nothing good. Pale, trembling, she ran to the door the moment she heard the elevator start again.

She snatched the paper eagerly from the boy's hand, opened it and looked frantically at the inner page. The item, alas, was there, the news which pierced her heart, and seemed like a claw tearing at her breast! Shrinking, scarcely able to stand upright, she went to the sitting-room and, still clutching the newspaper, threw herself on the sofa. Now it seemed to her that her life was indeed all spent. She lay there a long time, weeping. This man, to whom the newspaper bade farewell with words of affection, was Carlos Riga, the poet who was all generosity, all goodness, the boy who had been her lover and her friend in the best years of her life! He was the inspired dreamer who had freed her soul from the vulgar preoccupations of her kind; he was the idealist who had shared illusions and hopes with her; he was the man who had never spoken to her a word that was not kind and affectionate. No tears were enough for this loss. What though she never saw him and could not see him? She needed to know that he was alive, so as not to be altogether bad, so as not to become utterly unworthy. She wept. For death, in taking Riga away, broke her last connection with the only happy hours she had known in her life as slave and outcast.

She sat up on the sofa at last and read and re-read the *Patria's* tribute to the dead poet. Then she went to a closet and took from it Riga's "Poems," which she had bought before he became her lover —later he had written in a dedication which filled

the first two blank pages. With tears in her eyes she glanced over the well known verses, but as some of Pampa's snores echoed through the apartment, she hastily kissed the volume, and put it back in its hiding place, fearful lest Pampa should appear. She must also conceal the traces of her weeping lest Arnedo get up suddenly and see her swollen face.

She returned to the sitting room with the idea of writing perhaps to her sister. She heard the cook stirring about in the kitchen. A talk with the woman might distract her. With affected cheeriness she went out and ordered breakfast.

How afraid she was to linger in any place where she might encounter Arnedo! But she knew that he would demand an explanation of her gloom of the night before, of her refusal to obey his orders and dance. She went to the dining-room, in the corner of the apartment farthest away from the room where Pampa was sleeping. These devices seemed to postpone for awhile the moment she dreaded. What was Pampa going to say? He might beat her! He might drive her out of the house! What could she look forward to? Several times she asked the maid whether *el Señor* was getting up. In this way she learned when he was awake, when he asked for his breakfast, when he went to take his bath. Strange he should not be asking for her. And this silence terrified her! Finally, at noon, knowing that he must be nearly dressed, she tried to prepare herself to face him; but she was restless, anxious and nervous.

She heard his step approaching the dining-room.

The door opened. Scarcely glancing at her, and without a word of greeting, from the threshold Pampa motioned to her to come to him.

As she went into the sitting room, Nacha felt Arnedo's piercing gaze upon her face. She did not know where to turn her eyes. Back to a table, his hands in his pockets, Pampa stood watching her with a hard smile, apparently enjoying her distress.

"Well," he said at last, "I want to know what was the matter with you last night?"

"Nothing! I was ill—I told you."

She sat down as she spoke. Pampa, paying no attention to her answer, began to whistle a tango. Half dead with fear, Nacha had scarcely been able to articulate the words.

"Sick, eh?"

His hard eyes swept the girl sarcastically. A long silence followed, broken only by the jangling of some keys which Pampa was turning over and over in one of his pockets. He pretended to smile; then suddenly, exasperated, almost shouting, and with an ugly word, he broke out,

"Sick! Do you think you can get away with that excuse?"

Nacha, in terror, drew back towards the sofa, her knees and hands unsteady. Stammering, half crying, she begged him not to shout so. She had not meant to offend him!

"I've good reason to shout," he continued. "I've told you, haven't I, that I wouldn't stand your making up to anybody! You wore that fool face of yours last night because you think you're in love with someone—for all I know with that mangy cur

who butted in. Well, I'm not going to be made a fool of, understand? I'm not going to support a woman who goes around cry-babying and putting on."

"I was sick, I tell you."

"And I tell you, you weren't! If you say that again, I'll break every bone you've got in your body!"

"Pampa! please, don't talk so loud!"

Arnedo began to pace up and down, a torrent of vituperation and curses flowing from his lips, his eyes glittering with savage cruelty. Nacha thought for a moment of telling him the truth, that her tears were due to her grief for the death of a man she had loved; but she knew Arnedo would not believe her. Besides, would not her feeling for a man she had broken with, irritate Pampa for the very reason that he could not understand such subtleties of emotion? It seemed safest to be silent, to endure his insults and his anger without replying.

At last, having worked off some of his temper, Arnedo announced that he was going out, and would not be back for lunch. Nacha followed him to the door, submissive, and still frightened. She even drew up to him as though expecting a caress; but Arnedo brushed her aside contemptuously and slammed the front door behind him.

Though Nacha could not restrain an access of nervous weeping she felt, after all, a sort of relief. The scene had "ended well" for her! Her thoughts were free now to return to Riga. She would go to the cemetery, and at least see where they were burying him. And she would wear black, very simple

black, so as not to attract attention! In those moments at least she must appear worthy of the humble poet who had loved her!

She had just finished dressing when the maid announced a caller.

"Who is it?"

"A gentleman. He will not give his name."

Nacha's heart began to beat more quickly, and with an unaccountable expectancy.

"You know very well that I don't receive calls from gentlemen. . . . Is he well dressed?"

The maid nodded.

"Tell him I am not at home. Just a moment—well—yes, tell him I am not at home!"

The maid left the room, but returned almost immediately.

"He wouldn't go, Ma'am," she reported, considerably alarmed; "He walked right in. . . . He looks all right, but. . . ."

Nacha, with some uneasiness, went into the sitting room. To her amazement she found herself face to face with the stranger of the cabaret.

CHAPTER V

"WHO are you? . . . What do you want? . . ." asked Nacha after the first moment of astonishment.

"Who am I? Nobody in particular! Just someone who has guessed that you are unhappy, and is anxious to help you."

"But . . . you must have understood that I didn't want to see you again! I can't receive you here. You shouldn't have come to this house. It's hard on me! Think of the consequences! Perhaps I may lose my place here!"

"Your place here is what you hate more than anything else in the world!"

"How do you know? I'm not so sure. . . . I have a quiet home—and I'm free!"

The way the man looked at her made her break off. They were both silent for a time, the stranger, however, not taking his eyes from Nacha for a moment. She could see that he wanted to speak, but evidently did not dare. At last, in a low voice and with visible emotion, he began:

"Nacha—you see I know your name—you are not telling me the truth! You are not free! . . . You are suffering; and last night I saw how much! From the moment I first saw you I have felt a tremendous pity for you."

"Oh, really?" Nacha exclaimed, with a laugh of affected irony, calculated to put an end to the conversation with this man who had forced his way into her house, whose presence there was compromising to her, and who now, into the bargain, was allowing himself to express pity for her.

"Yes, real pity!" he repeated, evidently not understanding that her laugh was aimed at him.

"How kind of you! You must be an unusual sort of person!" Nacha said again, laughing scornfully.

"Your life is nothing but suffering," he continued, rather as though he were talking to himself and had not heard what Nacha said. "Here you live in humiliation, worry, perpetual terror of what is about to happen. That is not *living,* Nacha!"

"Call it dying if you like then. You are very amusing. I am sorry you must go at once! But if Pampa should find you here. . . . I wish he would come!"

They stood facing each other there in the middle of the room, the stranger listening quietly while Nacha poured out her nervousness in words, and yet more words, hurriedly, interrupting herself with her own forced laughter, and distractedly moving her hands and arms.

"Did you think you had made a hit with me? How funny! But don't fool yourself! I can't help laughing though, at the very idea! You're crazy. Only crazy people act the way you do. Anyway, I love Pampa. So there! You see what women are. He treats me badly, he despises me, he beats

me—but I wouldn't leave him for the first booby who comes along!

By way of reply he took her hand and led her to the sofa, where obediently she sat down. In a low voice that had in it the same ring of sincerity and feeling as before, he went on:

"Nacha, you accept this man's ill treatment because you are afraid of something worse. You cannot bear to think that tomorrow, or whenever he leaves you, you will have to go from one man to another—"

"This is too much! Who gave you the right to insult me? I am a decent woman!"

And then, finding her own words ridiculous perhaps, she began to laugh; and the laugh, this time, seemed to reveal her scorn for herself and her pride withal in living as she was living. The man's compassion grew.

"Why do you do it Nacha?"

"What?" she exclaimed, without checking her laughter.

"You are trying to bring together things that don't belong together. You are trying to make yourself out a bad woman, while really you are good."

Nacha, abruptly, became serious. She lowered her eyes and for several seconds sat motionless, looking at the floor, seemingly preoccupied. Finally she raised her head, and slowly turned her gaze upon this unknown friend. The peace she found in his eyes astonished her. After a long silence she asked him gently:

"Who are you? What is your name?"

He told her.

"Fernando Monsalvat . . ." she repeated, as though trying to inscribe the syllables on her memory. Then, apparently more at ease, she added with a smile,

"Why did you come to this house? Not to do me harm?"

"To do you good, little friend."

The girl smiled again, and again lowered her eyes, only to raise them once more to Monsalvat's face.

"Little friend—I like those words! Will you really be my friend, really, in your heart? It does me good to hear you speak to me that way. You don't know what it means to me to be told I am not bad. But, just the same, I am bad! Only I do everything I can to make people think I am even worse than I am."

She spoke in a yet lower tone as she went on, somewhat ill at ease from the intimacy of her confession:

"We girls have to make a show of being what we are not. It's easier that way for us to forget our real selves: we seem to become somebody else. I even go so far as not to blame the girl I was yesterday for all that makes me the girl I am today."

She was silent awhile, apparently searching her memory.

"Why do you try so hard to forget?" asked Monsalvat, "Wouldn't it be better to remember—if the present is so sad?"

"Sad? No, it isn't sad. Other people might think so. But really it isn't. It is worse than that

rather: it is empty, without any feeling at all. We live in a sort of perpetual confusion. It's almost like not knowing whether you're alive or not."

"But why not remember what is good in the past? Why not dream?"

"Remember?" Her expression suggested that a world full of past sufferings had taken possession of her imagination.

"Why remember? Just to feel bad?"

"Yes, little friend, to feel, and to suffer. If you didn't suffer, you would be horrible, all of you. It is because you suffer that you deserve pity and sympathy; and so you ought to seek out pain, and treasure it."

Nacha raised her hands to her face. In his own trouble, and in the compassion Nacha aroused in him, Monsalvat began to feel a kind of satisfaction. If she could still feel so deeply, there was hope.

"No, no!" she broke out suddenly. "We haven't the right to suffer!"

"Human beings have no greater and more sacred right."

"But don't you see that we girls must always be gay, dance, laugh: our profession is joy, not suffering. If we're glum, we lose our jobs. If we are not ready for gaiety and caresses, we're accused of not earning our pay."

Her lips smiled bitterly. Monsalvat, sitting with one elbow on his knee, and his chin resting on his hand, was looking at her as though trying to drink in her very soul.

"We have to make ourselves over," Nacha continued, "change our natures as well as our names.

Do you think it is only out of shame, or because of our families, that we hide our identities? No, it isn't wholly that. Taking another name makes us seem different somehow. It's like the Carnival. Under a disguise, you can do and say all the crazy things that come into your head. Are you ashamed afterwards? No, because when you take off your mask you are no longer the person who played all those wild pranks."

"And last night"—Monsalvat asked, after a brief pause, "why were you so unhappy?"

Through his conversation with Torres he knew the answer to this question; yet he listened anxiously for her reply.

"There you see what comes of being out of sorts! she said at last. "Why should anyone go to a cabaret to gloom and whimper like a simpleton? Pampa had a right to be angry. I couldn't help it. I had just learned that the only real friend I ever had, the only man I ever really loved, was dying. . . . And you can imagine how I feel today. It's lucky I can be alone. . . . I can afford to let myself cry . . . and remember! . . ."

Monsalvat had started at these words. He was glad to know that Nacha was still capable of feeling. At the same time, what she said about her love for Riga filled him with a vague uneasiness. Interrupting, he told her that he had known the poet.

"You knew him? Really? When? Where?"

From that moment Nacha looked upon Monsalvat as a brother. The wave of feeling carrying her towards him reached its height. She warmly took his hand for a moment and asked him to talk

to her about Carlos Riga. There was tenderness in her eyes now. The last vestiges of distrust had vanished. She could have told him everything in her life, shown him the very bottom of her soul. He had known Riga! He need offer no other credentials to claim her friendship!

They talked a long time of the poet, whom Monsalvat had met through Edward Iturbide. The two men had never become intimate friends; for Monsalvat did not frequent the literary Bohemia that had known Riga best. Nacha eagerly sang the praises of her dead friend. Never had there lived so fine a soul, so generous a heart, so kind a spirit! Talking of him seemed to intoxicate her. She spoke confusedly, and at times wildly, in a jerky monologue of broken phrases. The moment came when her eyes filled with tears and she shook with emotion.

"And to think that I, who am speaking to you like this, I left him—the best man who ever breathed! All because I was afraid of poverty, afraid of hunger! It's true I've suffered, Monsalvat, in the life I have been leading: no one can know how much. But all I have been through was nothing compared to the despair I felt when I deserted Riga. . . ."

The poor girl began to sob with great gasps that shook her from head to foot. Monsalvat tried to comfort her in words that astonished him, as he uttered them, for their consoling intensity: never had he heard nor spoken such words before. They seemed to well up from the very depths of suffering in which the girl before him was engulfed.

"I remember so well the morning when I left him," Nacha continued, "I shall remember it all the days God lets me live. We had a poor little room, dark, without air, the most miserable hole in a horrible tenement; and we had no furniture—just two wretched cots, old and broken and dirty. I hadn't slept that night, for I was crying all the time, going over my plans, and imagining how he would feel when he found I had gone."

She stopped a moment to check a sob, and then went on:

"At daybreak I dressed and made a little bundle of the few rags I owned, and all quite calmly. I wanted to put off the terrible moment as long as I could. But at last it came. I was going to leave him—and he loved me! It was so hard to do what I had made up my mind I must do. I went to take a last look at him. He was still asleep. I crept up to him on tiptoe, and kissed him, on the forehead. I don't know what happened then: I had to lean against the wall, for it seemed as though the whole world were falling away from me. My heart must have stopped beating. I thought I was dying and stayed there a long time, without moving, just stupified. When I could move I sat down on my cot and cried, then I got up to go. Every step hurt. I went so slowly, it seemed as though years must have passed—and at the door I looked back. —Why was I leaving him? Why? Why? . . . At last I crept out into the hall, and began to run, to run like mad, down the stairs, and out into the street. . . ."

"You must tell me your whole life, from the time

when you left your mother's," said Monsalvat after a pause.

Nacha hesitated, unwilling for a moment to comply. At last she told him her first tragic adventure; her love affair with one of the young men boarding in her mother's house; his brutality towards her when her timidity and shame placed her at his mercy; his attempts to exploit her, and the illness that followed. She recounted her attempts to support herself, afterwards, by honest work, the usual story of poverty, temptation and despair.

"There was no help for me. What could I do? I struggled from week to week; but debts, hunger, the need of clothes to put on my back, the luxury I saw around me! . . . One day I told a girl who worked in the store and was my friend that I would do whatever she advised . . . and she took me to a house she knew. . . ."

Nacha lowered her eyes, shame-faced.

"Did you live long in this fashion?" he asked when she had lapsed into silence.

"Six months! Then one day I couldn't stand it any longer: I left the store; and never went back to that house. I did sewing, I made artificial flowers; but . . . I had no luck. I took any work that came my way; but there were always back debts to pay off . . . and all the while every man who came near me made love to me. More than once I left my job in order to get away from them. . . . I hated them, feared them, loathed them. At last, after several years of this struggle, I got a job as waitress in a café. There I was more annoyed by men than ever; but I earned enough to be able to

afford a decent room and some furniture of my own. And there I met Riga!"

"And then?"

"After I left him? I went down again, this time for good and all. It was then that Arnedo took me."

They were silent for a space. Nacha did not move. Wide-eyed, she sat staring straight in front of her. What did she see? What were her thoughts? Monsalvat, watching her with an intensity that he had never before experienced, thought the critical moment had come.

"Nacha," he said, "you must get out of all this!"

Without looking at him, she slowly shook her head.

"But your repentance. . . ?"

"I do not repent." The words came out slowly and deliberately, and she turned to look straight at Monsalvat. "I did not intend any wrong. What should I repent for?"

"But you are dissatisfied with the way you're living?"

"God knows! I have suffered frightfully. How could one help being sorry for such an unhappy life?"

"Well then, why don't you make up your mind to leave it?"

"I want to, but I can't. It's Fate! I was destined to be a bad woman!"

All the energy of his spirit rushed to Monsalvat's lips in words frantically shaped to arouse in Nacha the decisive will to free herself from evil, to find

good at last. He seized both her hands. Feebly she tried to pull away from him.

"Nacha, you must change your way of living. You must be yourself! You must cease being someone else! You must learn to live! To live, do you hear? So as to be able to dream, to love—to remember! Your soul wants to be free, and together we are going to free it. This is slavery! You have been speaking of what you have already suffered. But that is nothing to the agonies that lie in wait for you. Youth too will leave you; and the day will come when you will be old, sick, worn out, a human rag, falling lower and lower. At last you will be, not only morally, but physically, a slave—The trader who is even now awaiting you will get you into his clutches. You will become a beast of pleasure, locked up in a house of evil; and you will have lost life, and hope—and love, too; for love has little to do with the criminal instincts of the men who will live on what you earn. You will be sold like a thing, at auction. 'How much is this woman worth? So much—take her! She is yours!' And then you will fall so low that only the dens of the underworld, only the gutters of the slums, will be open to you; for you will be old, your beauty eaten away. . . . Then finally you will die and no one will know that you have gone. Then Nacha, you, you whom I am speaking to now, will be tossed into the potter's field like a dead dog."

She was in a paroxysm of weeping now, writhing under this merciless attack, throwing back her head and tossing out her arms in tragic appeal to him to stop.

There was a ring at the front door.

Nacha started to her feet, and tried to remove the traces of her weeping. However, it was only the servant bringing in a letter from Arnedo. Nacha, dazed, had not the courage to open it. She asked Monsalvat to read it to her. Arnedo announced that he was dining that evening with some friends. Taking the letter Nacha stood motionless and silent, staring straight before her. When Monsalvat spoke, she neither answered nor looked up. A tragic expression settled on her face. She was trembling violently. Suddenly, raising her hands to her head, she cried:

"No, no, it can't be! It is madness. Go away at once! I never want to see you again. I was crazy. Go, I say!"

Monsalvat looked at her in amazement. He did not know what to do. Could he have lost her? Why a moment ago it seemed. . . . He tried to speak, to explain. But she pointed to the door with an obstinacy and an energy he had not dreamed she possessed. There was nothing for it but to obey—but this was an overwhelming catastrophe falling on his life. . . . His heart was breaking. . . . As he left the room Nacha did not even bid him good-by.

Arnedo's two lines had sufficed to remind her of reality, or rather of what she believed reality to be. With a great effort she stopped weeping and recalling scenes of the dead past. She was a different Nacha now; she was Lila, the tango dancer, Lila, the delight of the cabarets. For a moment, she forgot even Riga.

But, towards five o'clock, her heart triumphed over her will. Suddenly, desperately, fearful of being late, she put on her hat, rushed to the street, and took a taxi to the cemetery.

The services had begun. Anxious not to be noticed, she hovered on the edge of the cluster of people gathered there. It saddened her to see that scarcely twenty of the poet's admirers had escorted him to his grave. When they had all gone, she drew near to the spot where her friend's body had been laid. Her handkerchief over her eyes, she stood there a long time, motionless, clad in black, silently weeping, an image of Grief itself. The sky was overcast; the cold drizzle was gradually turning to rain. As the first gusts reached the mound on which she lingered, Nacha slowly walked away, and returned to Arnedo's apartment.

CHAPTER VI

MONSALVAT wondered how, after the events of the previous night and those of the afternoon, he could bring himself to dine that evening in Ruiz de Castro's palatial residence, in company with various worldly persons of the latter's selection. Was he not betraying his real self, being unfaithful to the new Monsalvat, born of his recent struggles? As he looked about him he could think only of the contrast between Nacha's unhappy life and that of these pretty women; and how different was the tragic dialogue which had occurred between him and that poor child, from the gay conversation buzzing about this aristocratic table!

Strange that contact with reality should have made him forget the occurrences of the afternoon! At this moment he had only a vague notion of the things he had so recently been feeling, of the things he had so recently been doing. He knew simply that he had just been living hours of intense spiritual excitement—an exhiliration approaching delirium, dominated by an obsession which had severed every connection between him and his material surroundings, and left him completely indifferent to whatever lay outside of his own inner preoccupations.

After leaving Nacha's apartment he had wandered about the streets for a time. Then, a little

quieted, he had called at the Ministry, less to inquire about the position promised him than to give himself something to do. There he met Ruiz de Castro, who had a few days before invited him to dinner, and who now insisted on his acceptance for that evening. He did not refuse. Why should he? Was he, perhaps intending to withdraw from society altogether? At any rate, here he was now, surrounded by elegant women, and by fashionable men of the world.

Ruiz de Castro, a classmate of Monsalvat's, was a likable fellow. His principal occupation was making himself agreeable to everyone, old or young, man or woman. He was a tall man and held himself extremely well, though his carefully nursed mustache, the height of his collars, the variety and splendor of his cravats, the profusion of jewelry on his fingers, left a faint suggestion of the Don Juan and of the fop in the total impression he made. Never had anyone seen Ruiz de Castro in clothes which did not look fresh from the tailor's; and he never failed to wear gloves even on the most terrible of summer's days. To a small fortune of his own he had added that of a millionaire's widow. His principal social hobby was the giving of suppers and small receptions to persons chosen from the most select circles of Buenos Aires. A lawyer by profession, he had read a great deal on all sorts of subjects and could talk entertainingly on art, and letters in particular; indeed by virtue of this intellectual pose, he considered himself superior to his surroundings. His guests were always men of recognized talent; doctors, distinguished lawyers, uni-

versity professors, men prominent in politics or literature. At such intimate parties these "highbrows" and their wives, all of whom were art enthusiasts, talked painting and sculpture, music and verse. Of course, for this élite, nothing done in Argentina was of any account. To Monsalvat the women seemed to be better informed on the whole, more sensitive and discerning than the men. Of the ten there assembled, all of them elegant, beautiful, and witty—were they not Argentine?—one wrote with real talent, though not for the public; another knew the art and literature of France better than a majority of Argentine novelists of much more serious pretentions to learning; still another, a young woman who was seated near Monsalvat, had studied philosophy diligently and had even attended Bergson's seminars in Paris. On this particular evening they were discussing Rodin, Debussy, Strauss and Zuloaga whose pictures at the Exposition had aroused general enthusiasm among the artists and amateurs of the capital.

Monsalvat felt out of place in this atmosphere. Most of the young women he had not met until then, though he had some acquaintance with their husbands. His being there at all was due to Ruiz de Castro's affection for him. De Castro, a good Argentine and a good *porteño,* instinctively admired success; and from his law school days had been wont to see in this young fellow, who always came out highest in examinations, and delivered the most impressive dissertations in class, a quite exceptional being, destined to social and public recognition. Monsalvat, for that matter, possessed a genuine

distinction of his own in Castro's eyes. His natural and simple manners were a delight to the more sophisticated attorney, as were his quiet and correct conduct, his way of never calling attention to himself even by his clothes, his manner of speaking —which was not the fruit of careful premeditation, but the spontaneous expression of a real preference for simplicity. It was Ruiz de Castro who had done most to draw Monsalvat towards society, literally dragging him into the Jockey Club, and then prompting various of his invitations to society functions; for the ambitious lawyer felt certain that a man of Monsalvat's promise would never fail to do honor to his sponsor; and he was ingenuously eager out of sincere friendship to have his friend's personal worth recognized by his own particular set.

Monsalvat, however, was too modest for the rôle assigned him: he had an exaggerated fear of appearing ridiculous. Dread of standing awkwardly in the limelight, of doing the wrong thing there, always made him keep his opinions to himself, no matter how much to the point they might have been. Timid, lacking confidence in himself and in others, he never gave anyone a glimpse of his real nature. Only a few intimate friends, among them the women who loved him, knew and appreciated his qualities. For them his was a deep, a noble, a generous spirit, modest and simple, without ambitions; a man who lived a satisfying inner life, and possessed an unusually rich culture. For others he was a colorless uninteresting individual, a bore and a nonentity.

The subjects touched upon in the conversation at

the dinner table developed nothing in common between Monsalvat and his neighbors. Art had never attracted him; and he knew little about literature. He had read voraciously, but rarely a novel or a volume of verse, or of literary criticism. Thus it was that when the ladies around him talked in dithyrambic ecstasies of Chabas or Loti, the conviction that he did not belong in these surroundings, bore in upon him not without a twinge of shame.

Monsalvat was not then thinking, nor did he wish to think, of what had so profoundly absorbed him during the afternoon and the preceding evening. Nacha's final attitude towards him, the manner of his dismissal, had deeply humiliated him, and made him long for the seclusion of his customary mode of living. What a fool to have believed it possible to regenerate such a woman! But his dinner coat helped him to forget all this, clothing him for the moment with self-importance, and inclination toward frivolity. He put his sister, Pampa Arnedo, his conversation with Torres, all out of his mind.

One of the only two bachelors present among all these married people, Monsalvat had been seated between two *niñas,* "girls," as unmarried women, of whatever age, are chivalrously called in the Argentine. The one on his right, Elsa, was a delightful creature, blond, virginal, with the unspoiled, however mature, freshness of her twenty-five years. The rather angelic slenderness of her shoulders gave her something of the ingenuously innocent appearance of Botticelli's maidens, with which the burning roses of her cheeks and lips scarcely harmonized. But she differed from the paintings of the early

masters in not having a line that was either angular or rigid. Roundness, indeed, was the conspicuous trait in the lines of her figure, the slope of her shoulders, the modelling of her cheeks and chin. She spoke with a certain ingenuous and charming candor, turning to full account her acquaintance with books and authors, which was remarkably varied. Monsalvat had known her in Paris five years before, and had called at her rooms there. He had observed with astonishment that this Botticellian virgin had among her favorite volumes the *Satiricon* of Petronius, Willy's latest novels, and other productions of the same outlook on life. Elsa's main sport was playing with men and their foibles. Her wide blue eyes, of a surpassing beauty, gazed out at the world in such fashion that no male could long resist their spell. She would smile maliciously at her victim and assail him on the side of vanity, praising his talents, or whatever claim to distinction he might have. She would listen to the frankest allusions—provoked, of course, by her—without a trace of embarrassment or annoyance, though she herself always avoided improprieties in speech, indeed every word that came from her lips seemed the very breath of youthful innocence itself. Nevertheless there were hostile tongues to criticise Elsa. When an unfavorable comment reached her ears she would evince a discreet amount of alarm, and then smile to show how little importance she attached to such matters after all. As to love and marriage she had no illusions. How could she, when every husband who came her way, no matter how exemplary by reputation, made love to her at

the slightest provocation? Looking at the world through *fin de siècle* French novels and the anecdotes of her friends, she judged it even worse than it is, seeing in it only the play of gross or perverted instincts. Never having felt or inspired love, she could not recognize it in the world about her. As to her women friends, they interested her so little that she never thought of inquiring what women were really like. In her heart she despised them and thought them poor fools to be talking of the love their sweethearts and husbands had for them. She "knew!" On more than one occasion, when she had heard a husband praised for his faithfulness, she found a way of having a few moments' conversation alone with him; and infallibly the model of fidelity soon was a model no more. Monsalvat had had with her several diverting and flirtatious conversations. But now, in his present critical state of conscience, at the awakening within him of far different desires, he could not possibly talk with her in the same tone. The young woman on his left, addressed as Isabel, had a lively intelligence but few physical charms. Nevertheless she displayed a certain attractiveness that evening. She knew how to make the most of her few good points, chief among which were her eyes, eager, sympathetic, trusting, questioning, quick to show embarrassment. Her face was too long, her mouth too large. Though her teeth were not pretty, she knew how to laugh—the clear, happy laughter of youth—and she showed them constantly. Her temperament and ideas were the exact opposites of Elsa's. Coming from a family of the old Spanish stock, and of devout

catholicism, Isabel was always talking "tradition"; while Elsa, from one of the newer families, typified the modern pagan and cosmopolitan spirit of Buenos Aires. Isabel was all prejudices and enthusiasms. She talked excitedly, with passion. She was incapable even of suspecting the true nature of Elsa's cynical temperament. To her the world seemed better than it is. Only unmarried men interested her, though the idea of marrying frightened her. Some of the world's injustices were quite beyond her ken; but she believed that whatever they might be, one should practise resignation. For priests, whose words on any theme were pure gospel for her, she had a superstitious reverence; she believed them pure and saintly all.

Monsalvat and his neighbors had maintained the most trifling of conversations. Elsa, as was her way, tried to give it a suggestion of intimacy, to which Monsalvat did not lend himself very cordially. He would have preferred to talk to Isabel. But was even this pious woman, with her dogmatic education, her habit of never doubting anything, likely to understand the complex anxieties besetting him? He reached the conclusion that he had nothing in common with his neighbors on either side, addressed them only when courtesy required, and directed his attention to the plump young woman opposite him, a rather amusing person, well-read, talkative, and critical of things and persons. At the moment she was running on about the theatres.

"You simply can't go to the *Odéon!* At least not on subscription nights! It's scandalous, the plays those French writers give the public! There's

never a decent character in them. What right have they to oblige the people who really support the theatres to listen to plays full of workmen, strikers, thieves—all the rabble! I'm sure I don't understand why the managers present such stuff!"

Isabel, and nearly everyone else who was listening, approved the speaker's view of the matter. Elsa looked at Monsalvat out of the corner of her eye, and smiled at him. For his part, he felt hot indignation against this woman who mentioned working men and thieves in the same breath, and would have nothing to do with humanity's troubles. A reply rose to his lips; but he was afraid of appearing ridiculous, and kept it to himself.

"Tell her what you think—you ought to!" said Elsa.

This half mischievous encouragement seemed suddenly to re-enforce the imperative of Monsalvat's own conscience. He felt somehow that he could no longer avoid speaking. With a smile at the plump lady, he said in a good natured tone:

"But, dear madame, it is for people like you that just such plays are given. How else could elegant and distinguished ladies of your world know anything at all about human suffering?"

"But," said the devout Isabel, "one goes to the theatre to be amused!"

"If the show or the book is not to your liking. . . ." Monsalvat began; but he was interrupted by several voices, among them that of Dr. Ercasty, who was sputtering about and exchanging knowing winks with his neighbors at the table. Dr. Ercasty

had long had his doubts about that fellow, Monsalvat!

The plump lady's voice rose above the others:

"And why should we be bored with that sort of thing, Mr. Monsalvat? I don't think I need to. Of course everyone is free to do as he likes. I have my own troubles, and I believe everyone has at some time or other; but I don't go about unloading them on everybody; so why should I be made to listen to other people's tales of woe? Anyway, they don't ever show us moral struggle, but just hatred, crime, and insults to society. If there are people who are hungry, why don't they work? But I don't care to go to the theatre to hear about things that don't interest me, and that I can't help; and I care even less to hear myself being blamed for all sorts of things I never heard of. The other day I saw an impossible thing called "Élise of the Underworld." I never was more disgusted! What on earth have we to do with that kind of women? No, Monsalvat, you are defending ideas that I know you can't really believe in."

Ercasty nodded congratulations to the plump lady and good humoredly suggested that Monsalvat had better throw up the sponge in the argument.

Ercasty was a physician, though he had abandoned practice to fill an important government position. In addition to a prominent paunch, and forty years of experience in this world, his chief distinction was his bland adeptness in the use of weapons little known in Argentine society—paradox, irony, sarcasm. In spite of his smoothness, however, Ercasty was a dangerous foe. When wounded he

could fight back like a lion at bay. Reactionary in everything, he would make no terms with democracy, liberalism, or even individualism. "Society" was his god. "Society" provided him with the ideas and sentiments he lived by. To express an opinion contrary to those approved in the best society, seemed to him a breach of good form, an offense as obnoxious as a crime. Years before, when Monsalvat was writing for the *Patria,* the articles which "Society" had so much applauded, wherein, with talent and learning, he justified all the iniquities usually defended by daily newspapers, distinguished persons, fashionable writers, and all good Christians who interpret the teachings of Christ to the advantage of their own worldly self-seeking, Ercasty had been a good friend of his. Now the doctor would have enjoyed seeing him come to a violent end.

"Don't plead the cause of those people, Monsalvat, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed the plump lady.

"Of what people?"

"Oh, the rabble, the bad people, 'the people,' in short!"

"The sovereign people!" offered Ercasty contemptuously.

"Don't defend them!" continued the lady. "See what they tried to do last May, just when we had a lot of very distinguished foreigners here, ambassadors and their wives, representatives of European nobility even! They wanted to make someone pay for their own laziness! So they tried to cast discredit on their own country, and spoil the Centennial celebration—a disgusting performance if ever

there was one! What can our distinguished visitors have thought? And to take advantage of such an occasion to gain their ends! There's no name for such conduct, Monsalvat!"

"And if I had been the government," said the doctor venomously, "I would have taken all these *gringo* organizers, soap boxers, agitators and strikers, and the bad Argentines who followed their example, stood them in a row on the Plaza de Mayo and shot them down. That would have been a number on the Centennial program, and example to the rabble!"

Monsalvat could listen no longer. He was quivering with indignation. Usually serene, quiet, and incapable of hating anybody, he would at this moment have enjoyed strangling the individual who was taunting him so flippantly. Now he realized that all the men and women around him were his enemies, representatives of his old out-worn ideas, of prejudices which he had come to abhor. On their faces he could see only insolent satisfaction with good living, a proclamation of inhuman selfishness, a spirit of evil, hypocrisy, pride, an absence of all human sympathy. What were their lives but one continuous lie? These men and women had no real existence. They were insipid creatures of something they called public opinion, thinking the thoughts of their crowd, following the morals, the standards, the tastes, the fads of their crowd! Their opinions were but a false semblance of opinion, their feelings but imitations of other people's feelings, their tastes, even their loves and their hates, mere aping pretense! Life for them was a

gigantic farce. Had any of them ever thought of living sincerely, of seeking any meaning in all they were doing? And these people with their accommodating philosophy, their pretentious political economy, their hypocritical charity, were responsible for the poverty in the world, for the misery of girls like Nacha, for the sufferings which social injustice was heaping up on every hand! Why had he had to live forty years before understanding this? How could he have sat at this table a whole hour, forgetting all he had been through that afternoon? But no! he was not sorry he had come! Henceforth he could have no doubts as to his place in the general scheme of things: he belonged in the front line of the attack on pride and falsehood and evil! All these individuals around him were so many tools in the hands of Injustice; and someone must put an end to their privileges, their ideas, their unfeeling self-approval! At any cost, even at the cost of blood and fire, brotherly love must be made to prevail over brute force! These men who called themselves Christians must be taught what Christian love really meant!

And the young ladies, the one on his left and the one on his right? To him they seemed instruments of Wrong, monsters of selfishness, beings without hearts. One represented the selfishness of pleasure, the other, the selfishness of class. They could think only of themselves, of their amusements, their clothes, their reading, their suitors, their pet vices, or of their religious and social practices. To them the world seemed quite satisfactory as it was; and everything could go on in the same way to the end

of time. In them there was no strong, spontaneous desire for the happiness of others. They were innocent of any attempt to relieve the pain of those who writhed in anguish in the world's black depths. They were little china figures, fashioned to adorn the society in which they lived, interested in knowing only the pleasant aspects of life. Now and then, from a play or a book, they received tidings of some one of life's tragedies; but always they turned away with disgust: such things were not for their fragile and aristocratic souls! Monsalvat was amazed at the ignorance, the unconscious cruelty their attitude toward life brought with it; and he could not help thinking of the outcry rising from the great city's multitudes who might some day clamor for vengeance as well as for justice!

But at the same time Monsalvat wondered if his present views might not perhaps be due to an attitude toward society engendered by his illegitimacy. His enemies would say so at any rate. They would attribute his bitterness to consciousness of his shameful birth, suspect him of trying to avenge his mother's disgrace on society at large. With how much truth? With none, whatever! Of that he was sure. For beyond all such considerations, the question of justice itself remained; and this justice, unaffected by personal wrongs, superior to any mean satisfactions, condemned Evil as Evil, and indeed, —it could not be otherwise—had decreed already the death of all that Monsalvat so intensely hated.

At last, when he could no longer contain the indignation burning within him, be began to speak; and the consternation was general. Ruiz de Castro,

who knew that his friend was an exceptionally timid person, loath to attract any attention whatever, stared at Monsalvat in astonishment. The doctor kept executing fidgety gestures of annoyance and tried a number of times to interrupt. Isabel seemed to be agreeing with Monsalvat's tirade, but refrained from committing herself since she was unable to decide whether what she was hearing was for or against religion. Elsa was enjoying the whole situation as if this outburst were a new kind of lark. She sat looking at Monsalvat with smiling delight.

What was he talking about? Of social inequalities; of the fact that some of us have millions while others cannot buy even bread: that some of us live in great palaces set in handsome parks; while others, in dank, filthy, tenements, exist in a monstrous promiscuity which pens ten and twelve human beings in one room; that some have a superfluity of everything—property, comfort, pleasure, culture, education—and that this superabundance does no one any good, since it does not go to those who lack everything; that some women possess dozens of costumes and necklaces worth thousands of dollars—every kind of luxury and ornament—while other women have to sell their bodies, give up life, health, their very souls, barely to clothe their nakedness, to have just enough bread to keep alive!

"Well, why don't they work?" the plump lady who had been listening horror-struck angrily inquired.

"Because they can't get work, madame! Because work, as things are now organized, is another priv-

ilege which we selfishly keep for our own purposes. I don't know how it happens that all the masses we trample on have not risen to exterminate us!"

Indignant protests greeted this explosion. Elsa, vastly entertained, laughed and applauded. Isabel became definitely hostile. All he was saying she had finally concluded, was contrary to the views of the Church Fathers. How frightful! The plump lady was quite frankly calling Monsalvat an anarchist, an assassin, and an enemy of the established order.

The guests had risen from the table and gathered into small groups. The plump lady seemed determined to argue with Monsalvat. Ruiz de Castro approached them, smiling.

"Are you two bent on rearranging the whole universe?" he asked in a tone of conciliating banter.

"Do you know, this Monsalvat has become a dangerous anarchist!" the woman replied.

"Yes! Nothing is so dangerous as telling the truth!" was Fernando's rejoinder.

"But some individuals are even more dangerous than the truth—the dreamers, I mean. Isn't that so?" Ruiz de Castro addressed the remark to the plump lady.

"Certainly! And just consider what Monsalvat was saying about those women! Why, he was practically blaming me for the fact that—that they—well, you understand. Indeed you understand these matters only too well! I believe that what is wrong with all those creatures is that they lack the fear of God. Before giving themselves up to such a life they ought to beg, take places as servants, go

to houses of charity, bestir themselves at any rate! There's no lack of work. . . ! Let them do like the men; but instead of turning into anarchists or socialists and going about from strike to strike, they ought to submit to the will of God, and resign themselves to their lot! As we all have to!"

"Yes, that is true," exclaimed Isabel, emphasizing the last word as if she were impressed in advance by what she was going to say, and with all the conviction of a person who has found a clinching argument. "That is very, very true! Why stir up strikes? It's so wrong, so wrong!"

The plump lady added with a sigh of melancholy resignation: "Everyone must accept his lot in life!"

"When it is yours," said Ruiz de Castro, smiling, "one can well afford to think so. But I, instead of your lot, would choose your husband's!"

"Mine?" she exclaimed, passing over this gallantry. "But we are almost poor! I can't say we are actually hard up; but aside from my husband's salary as deputy, we have nothing but the rents from a few insignificant pieces of property and a farm near Buenos Aires. Still, I don't complain. Others have millions—Very well! I don't envy them: I accept God's will."

Monsalvat began to wonder why he was lingering among these people, the object of their general contempt. For that matter, he had no right to be there. He took leave of his hosts and went away.

The night air cleared his brain; but how tired he was, how sick! As he walked on, he began to feel in better spirits. He would have no more to do with what he called organized Injustice. He

saw now the road he must henceforth follow. Good dwelt with the oppressed; and the only work worthy of a man was to fight for the downtrodden. He would give his life and the little money he had to the poor of the earth. People said he wanted vengeance? Very well! That would be his vengeance!

It was midnight when he reached his rooms; there dissatisfaction with himself came over him again. He took off his evening clothes, and tossed them carelessly aside. His thoughts reverted to Nacha. Why had she dismissed him after listening so long to him, after confiding her own history so intimately? Could he have fallen in love with her? Was this the explanation of his actions that evening? Oh, Nacha, Nacha! What would he not give to see her, for even the hundredth part of a second!

As his eye wandered about the room, he saw a letter lying on the table. It was from his mother. She was asking him to come to her for she was very ill, and believed death near. A few seconds later Monsalvat was hurrying in a taxi toward Lezama Park.

CHAPTER VII

MONSALVAT'S mother had been a very pretty girl; but at sixty she possessed not even the remnants of her earlier beauty. Aquilina Severin had left her parents' modest shop to work at a fashionable dressmaker's establishment on Florida Avenue. One fine day Fernando's father met her on the street, made love to her in due form, and succeeded in winning her. Aquilina was twenty when her son was born. Soon after this her lover, Claudio Monsalvat, married a girl of his own social position; which did not prevent his giving Aquilina an allowance and visiting her from time to time. Ten years later a girl Eugenia, came into the world. Claudio had made over a piece of property to Aquilina, but died without bequeathing anything to his natural children. Their mother had urged them to contest the will made wholly in favor of the legitimate family; but Fernando, then in Europe, refused to consider such a suggestion. His mother lived on the two hundred or so *pesos* which were the income from her property, until she sold it on the advice of an attorney of the neighborhood. The proceeds of the sale were turned to good account by various speculators; and shortly thereafter Aquilina found herself in the street, penniless. From that time on her son supported her.

Of scant native endowments, Aquilina Severin had had little education, and remained a stupid, incompetent woman. The comforts supplied by Claudio represented the height of wellbeing in her eyes. She believed herself a fine lady, deserving of the world's envy. Her parents had not been married, and she had none of the current prejudices in favor of legal unions. She considered love the important thing in these matters and had for that sentiment a high regard, though the word "love" had a very elastic scope in the usage of this unfortunate derelict.

Her daughter's education, under the circumstances, could only be disastrous. Fernando at various times tried to take a hand in his sister's training. He advised his mother to send her to school, and to discourage certain of Eugenia's undesirable friendships. But Aquilina always replied:

"And why? What will she get out of it? I never went to school, and I came out all right! I know what I am doing, and it's nobody's business!"

Eugenia therefore got her schooling in the streets. She spent her days with other small girls on the sidewalk, or on the window balconies, where her graceful figure and fine black eyes attracted plenty of attention. When Eugenia was twenty she made certain attempts to overcome the waywardness naturally resulting from this bit of mistraining. She even tried to get work in a shop. But Aquilina objected, saying that the pay was an insult, that the girl would kill herself with work, come to look old before her time, and by accepting such a lowly station, harm her father and brother in the bargain.

It was Aquilina's desire that Eugenia meet some rich or distinguished man who would fall in love with her and set her up in an establishment of her own. She knew that no one but a laborer or some socially insignificant person would marry her daughter; and she preferred one of those extra-legal arrangements which she took as a matter of course without the slightest scruple. Aquilina could conceive of nothing better for her daughter than a situation resembling her own. She believed romantically in eternal love, in everlasting fidelity—and in men's promises! She never spoke of these ambitions to her daughter, much less to her son; but Eugenia divined something of them just the same.

In the house next door lived a family of position and wealth. One of the sons of the family was wont to make eyes at Eugenia whenever he caught sight of her, without going so far as to speak—out of fear for Fernando perhaps, who in those days used to visit his mother two or three times a week. One day Aquilina observed to Eugenia in a tone which expressed her meaning even more clearly than did her words:

"Now we'll see if you can land your *beau*. . . . He's a fine young man—and he's rich!"

"But, mother, do you think he will marry me?"

"I don't know. We'll find that out later; but if he's reliable, and faithful, and affectionate, it doesn't matter much."

She stopped at the look of disgust and sadness in her daughter's eyes; for Eugenia, curiously enough, was a very normal girl at bottom. She wanted a husband and a home, but from all she had heard

her mother say on this topic, she believed that, preliminary to "landing" men, it was necessary to angle for them.

It was at this time that Aquilina took into her service the woman, Celedonia, who from then on, for ten years, was her constant companion. Celedonia, a talkative, rather handsome creature, and of mixed blood, kept the whole neighborhood busy talking scandal about her. Fernando frequently begged his mother to get rid of her; but for Aquilina, her new servant was the most entertaining of company. She brought home all the gossip of the block; the deceptions practised by supposedly rich people to make an impression at little expense; the quarrels of husbands and wives; the love affairs of daughters or servants; the pranks of the men in the various families; the vices, in short of everybody. During Carnival, Celedonia always went, in costume and mask, to the balls at the Victoria Theatre, where she encountered others of mixed blood like herself. The next day she would come home, still half drunk, and spend the afternoon telling her mistress what she had seen. To Aquilina these stories of low life were like a window opening on a world of gaiety denied her. She would rock with laughter at the anecdotes, enjoying descriptions of things of which she could have no experience, and almost envying Celedonia her good times. Sometimes Eugenia too was present, listening to these stories; and it never occurred to her mother to cut them short on account of her daughter's presence.

Not long before Fernando left on his second trip for Europe, Eugenia made Arnedo's acquaintance.

He was a bold, handsome, domineering youth, apparently good-natured; and it did not take Eugenia long to fall in love with him. The first time he saw her, as he chanced to be passing the house she lived in, he made clear, in unmistakable fashion, what a profound impression she made on him. Catching sight of her in her doorway, he stopped a moment, on the sidewalk, then took up a position on the street corner; after a while he walked past her several times and finally approached. Eugenia, who was alone, stepped back a little; but Arnedo snatched at her hand, and in an imperious tone, ordered her to stay.

"But someone may be coming!"

"I don't care. I am crazy about you!" he declared, in a simulated burst of emotion.

They talked awhile. They told one another their names; and Arnedo as he caressed her hand, declared a consuming passion. For several evenings they continued their conversations in the vestibule. Eugenia never doubted Arnedo's sincerity when he promised to marry her very soon.

From that moment Arnedo was her master. Aquilina and Celedonia knew what was going on but did not interfere. The girl's mother believed that here at last was the man she was hoping for; and she was quite confident that her daughter would know how to manage him; Celedonia was not the one to discourage such conduct, surely.

Fernando was in Europe when Eugenia ran away with Arnedo. Her mother imagined that this was a desirably decisive act. She did not quite understand it, for the young people could perfectly well

have taken her into their confidence; but she thought that perhaps methods in these matters had changed since her youth. As for Eugenia, she was quite ready to believe, when Arnedo took her to his quarters, that the affair was "serious." Nevertheless Arnedo left her at the end of a year. Eugenia returned to her mother's; and Aquilina's only reproach was on her lack of skill in managing men. For several weeks the girl was keenly conscious of shame, especially when she met her acquaintances of the neighborhood. One day she decided that she could no longer live with her mother, whom her presence in the apartment disgraced; and besides her mother's toleration of her conduct was extremely distasteful to her. She went away, leaving no word as to where she was going. For several months Aquilina had no news of her.

Eugenia's first flight had not been mentioned to Fernando; but when letters from her ceased to come he demanded an explanation. On his return from Europe, he got the whole story; Eugenia was living somewhere with Arnedo—this was all the mother knew. Fernando was not only distressed, but somewhat alarmed at this news, which, he believed, might harm him in his profession if it were widely known. His sister's conduct had a great deal to do with his leaving the country a second time, and remaining away for seven years.

Since his return Fernando had visited his mother very little, in spite of her ill health. The mulatto woman, whom he intensely disliked, was always present during his interviews with her. Once he had suggested asking her to leave the room; but

Aquilina begged him not to do so. For that matter Celedonia needed no authorization from her mistress for what she did or did not do. She ruled the establishment as absolute sovereign, managing Aquilina's funds, and sharing life with her mistress on equal terms. Aquilina adored her son, but she could not prevent the mulatto's exhibiting some of the hatred Monsalvat inspired in her; and the very natural effect of this was to discourage his visits.

When he reached the apartment that night, he found the outer rooms crowded with people. This convinced him that his mother must be dying; and with a sinking heart he rushed to her bedroom. The mulatto and another woman were there preparing hot applications; and he noticed also a young girl of some twenty years who appeared both pretty and respectable.

Monsalvat brushed the women aside and leaned over to kiss his mother.

"Have you sent for the doctor?" he asked turning around.

"Doctor! Why a doctor?" exclaimed the mulatto scornfully. "Here is Mamita Juana, who knows more than all your doctors put together!"

Without replying, Fernando went to the door and addressing the men gathered there asked if there was anyone who could deliver a letter for him at once. A gray-haired old fellow with a long beard, his shoulders bent, and his clothing quite disreputable, pressed forward, holding out his hand.

"Don't you remember me, Doctor Monsalvat? Don't you remember Moreno, the attorney? That's me! Why, we worked together once!"

Monsalvat remembered that he had given this man employment in his office for a short time. Later he had found the old fellow again, earning a miserable pittance from odd jobs in the law courts.

Monsalvat took a pencil from his pocket and wrote something on a card, while Moreno went on talking:

"Here I am, Doctor, still alive, and that's some job! Those days are over—my law days, I call them. Don't think I'm stuck on myself; but just the same I'm proud of the work I did back there. The law in this country of ours owes me something, Doctor! I helped it along. We took part in some big law suits, and we won them. I say 'we' because, after all, the other fellow did his share of the work. And here I am, Doctor, with ten children on my hands, poor as a rat, and going down hill fast. . . ."

In spite of his shabbiness, Moreno still possessed some of the manners of a more cultivated society than the one that now knew him. He smelt of cheap whiskey and his person was none too clean; but the semi-obscurity of the hall was to his advantage.

"Deliver this letter to this address at once. Take a cab, and wait for an answer! Bring Dr. Torres back with you."

Fernando gave him some money, urged him to hurry, and was about to return to his mother's bedside when a woman near by said:

"Don't let him go alone, sir. He'll stop for a drink in the first saloon he sees."

"This is the companion of my sorrows," proclaimed Moreno, "and see how she treats me! She

owes me everything; I have given her ten children and my name, raising her to my own social position—"

"He's just talking, sir. We have no ten children —only seven. He thinks you'll give him some money."

The woman was half angry, half smiling; and the others standing around, who seemed to have quite forgotten the sick woman, burst out laughing.

"You'd better let my husband go with him," said one of the women, pointing to her man.

"All right. Will you?" asked Monsalvat.

Moreno, with an offended expression, placed one hand on his chest, and declared oratorically:

"Doctor, what has been said is offensive to my . . ."

"Stop talking, my good Moreno, and hurry, if you please!" Monsalvat interrupted. "I'll pay you well for your trouble."

"At your orders, Doctor, whatever you say," the man replied, inclining his head in humility. "It's you that asks it, sir, and I'll do anything for you! Just as in those distant days which never will return, Moreno, Attorney at law, will always. . . ."

The man who was to accompany him grasped his arm and hustled him away. Fernando returned to his mother's room.

Aquilina was seriously ill. From her rapid pulse Monsalvat guessed she must be suffering from a heart attack. But what was there to do? He thought of cold applications and asked the girl, Moreno's oldest daughter, to prepare them. The woman quack remained in the room, partly enjoy-

ing the prospect of witnessing the doctor's failure, and partly bored. Celedonia sat at the bedside, casting contemptuous glances at Monsalvat.

"Leave me with my mother," he ordered, and the women went out, grumbling.

When Aquilina found herself alone with her son, she began to weep. Up to this moment she had been overwhelmed by the fear of death. But now her son's presence seemed to comfort her.

"Fernando," she began, when she was able to speak, "I have been a bad mother. If I could only see Eugenia before I go! Look for her . . . find her . . . so that she will come tomorrow. I was a bad mother I guess! It was my fault she went away! I knew what she was doing; I allowed her to go on."

Fernando tried to console her, assuring her that she was exaggerating her responsibility. He was sincere in this, for he could not believe his own mother had consented to her daughter's wrongdoing. In the miserable wretch before him he could see not a bad but an ignorant woman, doomed by her own foolishness, and by the circumstances of her life.

"Yes, a bad woman," repeated Aquilina. "After Eugenia had given herself up to a bad life, I let her come here, and I let her give me money. At first, after Arnedo left her, she came back, and wanted to be a good girl. But Celedonia couldn't let her . . . and I knew it all the time. Oh, Fernando, can you forgive me? Can you forgive me for all the harm I did you, too? I saw more than once how unhappy you were on account of me. If I had been

a good mother, I would rather have died than harm you!"

Fernando scarcely heard the words. His mother's confession had made him draw his hand away, instinctively. He sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped, his eyes closed. What pain this was, penetrating to every fibre of his body! His mother's self-accusation gave him a sense of unendurable shame; but at the same time the load of responsibility resting on his shoulders seemed to grow lighter. Aquilina had grown quieter after making her confession; and now he, too, felt a certain measure of peacefulness creeping into his heart. When he first listened to his mother's strange words he thought he was going to hate her, loathe her; but now, on the contrary, he loved her more than before. All the pity he was capable of seemed too little for this poor, foolish, dying mother of his; he began to sob, kissed her, put his arms around her with a tenderness which was the poor woman's only comfort during those moments.

"Mother, it is my fault, not yours," he assured her, when he could speak. "I intended coming to tell you so, even before you sent for me. All the responsibility is mine. I have had a better chance than either you or Eugenia; I knew more about life, and I should have taken care of you, both of you, protected you—tried to educate you. That was the task I should have set myself! Instead, I came here as little as possible, because I didn't want to be reminded of the facts I hated. I never really took any interest in you. Eugenia owes me nothing, because I never gave her anything; I

never spoke to her openly, frankly; I never helped her by word or act. Instead of staying with you both to take care of you, I went to Europe, to get away from my mother and sister, to forget them."

"I brought disgrace upon you. You are paying for what is my fault, Fernando."

"No, it is not your fault! Something far more guilty than you is to blame! But, never mind! All this is very far away from us now, mother. At last I have come to know myself, and to know the world we live in."

Aquilina suddenly grew worse. Fernando, anxiously waiting for the doctor, sent Moreno's wife to watch for him at the street door. His mother seemed to be struggling for breath, and he thought oxygen would help her.

"You must find Eugenia," she gasped. "I need to know that she forgives me. Look for her . . . tell her . . ."

Fernando was afraid to think where he might find Eugenia. What had become of her by this time? His thoughts turned to Nacha; and he wondered if those two had perhaps met. Nacha, Eugenia! . . . Surely his was a strange destiny, to have spent all his life far from this class of women, and now to find himself taking a part in their lives. Nacha! Eugenia! Was he in love with Nacha? If not, why did he think of her all the time even on such an occasion as this one? And where would such a love lead him? If he found Eugenia, he would take her to live with him. Why should not Nacha live with them also, in fraternal companionship? Eugenia, Nacha! The

two seemed only one now. Their souls, their lives, even their forms, seemed to blend into one haunting symbol of human sorrow. Selfishness, ignorance and evil were their relentless enemies, and worse than any of these was the smug indifference of the prosperous.

The doctor's arrival roused him from his ponderings. Torres sent him at once for some oxygen, and he took Moreno with him.

In the hack he asked the old attorney if he knew where to find Eugenia. Moreno knew perfectly well, but he did not wish to part with his information too lightly. He assured Monsalvat that he did not know, but that he could find out.

"It will be a hard piece of work, doctor; but as long as it's for you . . . I'm pretty hard up. You see how it is. . . ."

"I'll give you whatever money you need. But you are to bring her to her mother's the very first thing in the morning, understand?"

Moreno promised. He began to talk of Eugenia, of her beauty, of the luxury amid which she was reported to be living. It was a shame . . . but what could be done about it? And he added philosophically, as if it might console Monsalvat:

"You mustn't take it too hard, doctor. That's the way things go in this world."

When they returned to the apartment with the oxygen, Aquilina was dead.

CHAPTER VIII

THE fit of anger during which Nacha had ordered Monsalvat out of her house had quite passed by the time she returned from the cemetery. She could only marvel at her sudden refusal to hear more of what but a few moments before had offered her starving life the ideal it craved. Nevertheless, the regretful gentleness pervading her now was due undoubtedly to the soothing effect of her visit to Riga's grave. The thought of the dead poet made her repent of her sudden harshness towards Monsalvat. After that silent leave-taking from her friend, how indeed could she help yearning to turn away from the life she was leading?

And yet could she accomplish that? No practicable plan occurred to her; Monsalvat might have helped; but she, stupidly, had driven him away. Strange how certain she felt, nevertheless, that he would not continue offended, that he would forgive her for everything in the end. Still, it was not probable now that he would look for her. Where could she find him? What were his occupations? What places did he frequent? Alas! she knew nothing of him at all, except his name.

By some strange confusion in her imagination, the figures of Monsalvat and Riga began to blend

in her memory. She could not think of one apart from the other. Was there, perhaps, some spiritual resemblance between them? Outwardly they were such different men. Monsalvat gave an impression of serenity, of poise; Riga, on the contrary, seemed all nerves, all tension. What had Riga, weak, sensitive, the typical neurotic, the creature of whim and circumstance, to set against Monsalvat's strength of mind and will? Evidently this courageous stranger who had broken his way into her intimacy so suddenly had most of the requirements for success. Riga was one of those men born to fall of their own weakness, even before the battle of existence overwhelms them. But both were generous, high-minded, incapable of envy, or meanness of any kind. What good luck to have met a friend like Monsalvat at just this moment! And what an irreparable misfortune to have lost him forever!

When Arnedo came home early in the evening, he brought his friends, and their women, with him as usual. Nacha was once more lost in gloom. She tried to talk, and jest in the spirit of the party, but her words seemed to stick in her throat, and her laughter had in it no note of gaiety. Moreover, all her attempts to conceal her real state of feeling were useless. Arnedo and his companions were not to be deceived; and Pampa's face openly expressed the displeasure he was experiencing. Finally he called one of the other men to an adjoining room and Nacha, suspecting something, and listening intently, overheard this dialogue between them.

"Why don't you get rid of her, old man? When a woman goes around looking like Good Friday all day long . . ."

"She never used to be like that. There was no one could beat her when it came to dancing, and seeing that things went right in the kitchen, and dressing, and singing and playing, and entertaining people generally. She always gave a fellow a good time, Nacha did. She was good-natured, full of spirit, and . . ."

"Well, what's happened to her, do you suppose?"

"I don't know. Anyhow I'm going to let her go. You know, I told you about that matter, down at Belgrano. . . . Well, it's just like this." And Pampa gave a claw at the air with his fingers closing.

"I see," his companion replied. "So you've got a substitute for Nacha! What about to-day's trip out there? Anything doing?"

Nacha did not care to listen further. She joined the other girls, and was now apparently in better humor. When the two men came back she plunged with deliberate fervor into the merriment, reaching out for the champagne, and pretending drunkenness—not for Arnedo's edification, indeed; she knew now that her fate was settled—but to leave a good impression on all these people whom perhaps she would never see again.

Meanwhile the memory of Monsalvat and of Riga was vivid in her mind; their image looked up at her from the hollow of her wine glass; she seemed to see them standing in the doorways, their

eyes sad with reproach; now they were directly in front of her, now she felt them by her side. One of Arnedo's friends was speaking, and she thought surely it was Monsalvat's voice she heard and was about to call his name. Later she had the impression that Riga was about to come into the room; and she actually looked around at the door —not without some alarm, on her companions' account. How terrified they would be at this intrusion of the dead! Arnedo and his guests were talking of the Centennial celebration; of "shows" and cabaret performances, of chorus girls and races. There were three women and four men at the table, only one of the latter in evening clothes. All of them had been present in the cabaret at the time of the quarrel with Monsalvat; and, since that whole occurrence was not an ordinary one, they soon began to discuss it.

"Who was that fool?" asked "the Duck," who had led the chorus of burlesque weepers in the cabaret.

At this question everyone looked at Nacha, who sat there anxiously shifting her eyes from one to another of her inquisitors.

"Why," drawled Arnedo, with an air of importance nevertheless, "he is the brother of one of my best conquests. Don't you all remember Eugenia?"

Nacha turned cold. Did Monsalvat know? Where was this Eugenia? Was she, too, part of "the life"? Ah, yes; that was it! That explained Monsalvat's actions, and his fervent words of that afternoon. So, then, he was not in love

with her! The interest he showed in her was the interest he had in all girls sharing his sister's lot. How stupid not to have thought of that before! Of course! How could a man like Monsalvat care for an outcast like "Lila," like Nacha Regules!

Another guest, the man in the dinner-coat, a tall and skinny youth, whom his companions, out of regard for his large-boned nose, called "the Parrot," declared that Monsalvat wrote for the *Patria*, where articles had appeared signed with that name; whereupon all four men felt moved to express their scorn for this "literary fellow," a man who spent his time reading trash and writing nonsense and could only be an utter ninny. These young descendants of Moreira were, for that matter, quite sincere in the contempt they voiced. Products of the aggressive money-making illiteracy of the Argentine, they instinctively hated the "intellectual" as a menace to the power of their class, and could not look upon students and scientists save with disdainful hostility. From their point of view any man under forty who lived for something besides "a good time" was beyond comprehension. They despised books and newspapers; for they vaguely realized that in these lay a power of intelligence destined sooner or later to put an end to the half-breed barbarism incarnate in themselves.

As the dinner went on, the *patoteros* tried to exhibit their brilliancy. But wit for them consisted at best in anecdotes of the sort known in Argentina as "German jokes"; in pelting one another with bread pills; or in suddenly bursting out with some deafeningly loud rendition of a snatch from

a music hall ballad. One of their best numbers was "the Duck's" weeping act, his most successful parlor stunt. Then "the Parrot" would rise from his place, disappear, and return wearing a woman's hat; or Pampa, flourishing his revolver, would pretend he was fighting a duel, seasoning his antics with picturesque obscenities from the jargon of a well-known vaudeville act. The others, meanwhile, acted as chorus and audience, laughing, and contributing an assortment of musical accompaniments.

Nacha was now quite merry; she began to sing, beating time on her glass with a spoon. The others took up the suggestion, and improvised an orchestra. "The Parrot" jumped up on the table to conduct, the others remaining in their places.

"Get down off of that!" yelled Arnedo.

The maid stopped in the doorway, doubling up with laughter at this uproarious scene. Shrieks, explosions of mirth, snatches of song, the clink of glasses, exclamations, and words from the gutter mingled in a deafening din. Suddenly it occurred to Nacha to begin a *jota.* Arnedo rushed at her, clasped her in his arms and bellowed:

"That's the way I like to see you, my little nigger!"

"I suppose so," said Nacha, throwing him off, "but what about your 'nigger' in Belgrano? You can do without me, now that you've found someone who can stand you!"

Arnedo stopped short, paralyzed for the moment. Then his eyes slowly went the rounds of his friends. Befuddled as he was, he could not

remember to which one of them he had mentioned this affair. He turned, finally, on Nacha.

"Who told you that? Come, speak up, this moment. Have you had a detective trailing me? You're mean enough to! . . ."

Nacha looked at him in astonishment, pretending she did not understand.

"What is the matter? What did I say?"

Arnedo staggered towards her, an arm lifted to strike. Nacha covered her face with her hands to ward off the blow. The man was beside himself with fury. It was not so much that Nacha knew about his adventures; he had boasted of them to her more than once himself. What irritated him, because it lowered his prestige with his "crowd," was the fact that she was breaking with him. That was his right! . . . And that she had found a pretext for doing so. . . . Besides, he got it into his head that Nacha was going to Monsalvat; and the thought that the man he had offended was turning the tables on him was unbearable. A new idea, however, suddenly thrust itself upon him.

"Was it one of these girls who told you?" he broke out, facing the two startled women.

"What's it all about?" asked one of them.

"This is the first I've heard of it," declared the other.

Arnedo seized his glass, which was full of wine, and drained it at a gulp. He stood brooding for a few seconds at the table; then, thrusting his right hand inside his belt, he cried out to the man with whom he had been talking when Nacha overheard him:

"Now I remember! Of course it was you. . . . You thought you'd play a joke on me by blabbing! You always were a dog; but now you're going to pay up!"

Therewith he jerked out his revolver and began pointing it about in various directions. His friends seized his arm, but in healthy fear of an accident, refrained from any effort to take the weapon from him. The scene was well on its way to a bad end, when a man named Amiral walked in upon the group.

This fellow, the perfect type of the impoverished rake, was always to be found hovering about some couple or other, never under any circumstances accompanied by a woman; he would have to pay for her drinks. He shared the champagne other people bought, rode in taxis other people paid for, and even gathered a few crumbs from other people's love affairs. Very tall, very thin, with extremely long arms, skeleton-like legs, a wan face, thick up-turned mustache, and bulging, glassy eyes, he was far from prepossessing in appearance. Though his perpetual penury made him something of a joke with women, Amiral was born for "gallant" adventure. In the eighteenth century he would have been a Marquis of Marivaux or a Count of Goldoni, prodigal of love and madrigals. In the less favorable present, his position in society, such as it was, derived from his trips to Europe.

In Argentina there is no more valid claim to consideration than foreign travels. The oftener one goes abroad, the greater one's "prestige," and

Amiral "went across" every two years. He travelled parsimoniously, carried his own luggage, never used a cab, and was extremely sparing of tips. Generally he took lodgings in Paris, where he lived on borrowings from his fellow-countrymen. He knew nothing of the French capital save the life of the boulevards, of the Abbaye de Thélème, of the cabarets, and of the furnished apartments on the Chaussée d'Antin. However, in Argentina, this was readily marketable knowledge; a number of *patotas* tolerated Amiral for his amiable discourses on the gay life of Paris. His inevitable stock in trade was to expatiate on the theme that Buenos Aires had "no atmosphere"; and could the authority of such a widely travelled man be questioned in these matters? When, in the circles he frequented, the discussion turned to women, someone could always be heard to quote Amiral's oracular utterances: "Amiral says that in Paris . . ." and the point under discussion was settled.

"Why, my good friends, what's all this, anyway? Are you rehearsing for the movies?" said the new arrival, coming into the room with his accustomed laugh, his grotesque arms describing absurdly elongated arcs in the air.

"Why, you boys aren't serious, are you? Oh, say. . . . Really now, good fellows like you . . ."

The intervention had a quieting effect on Arnedo, who put his revolver away. One of the women tried to explain the scene to the newcomer, but Amiral held her off at the ends of unbelievably long arms.

"No, no! No post mortems, please! The act is all over, my young friends. Now for a merry little interlude. Come, bring on the suds! Say, girl, hasn't Pampa got a couple of bottles of champagne? I like mine dry."

The servant made haste to obey the order. Amiral punctiliously drank a toast to the mutual love of "the Arnedos," and once more laughter, shouting, dancing, clinking of spoons on glasses, general uproar, became the order of the evening. Arnedo, supported by the hilarious demands of the company, insisted that Nacha declare she had no intention of leaving him; and yielding to this unanimous pressure, she obeyed. Thus, under Amiral's protection, a reconciliation was accomplished. Arnedo took Nacha from her place and made her sit on his lap, while jests at this public flirtation began to fly back and forth.

The first bottle had been drunk, and they were making good headway with the second, when Nacha, who had been gradually returning to her depression, burst into tears:

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Amiral.

"Oh, nothing!" Arnedo growled. "Show her the label on a bottle and she gets one of these fits."

Now completely succumbing to the champagne, her face distraught and her arms and body twitching in absurd gestures, Nacha began to talk in a rambling, incoherent jumble of words that moved the company to uncontrollable hilarity.

"I loved him so much, and he died!" she moaned. "He was here this afternoon, and he told me he loved me; and now he is dead. There never was

another man like him—so good, so brave! No one else would have done what he did in the cabaret—Carlos Riga was his name. Oh, poor girl that I am! He told me I would suffer—that I must suffer—but I want to live—to live—I want to live and to suffer! He said he would be my friend. Why did he do that? And then go and die right afterwards? Everyone who loves me goes and dies! You're laughing at me! Why? Isn't it the truth? I may be all you say I am, but I know what love is, and I'm not going to leave this house . . ."

"She has a fine one on, has Nacha!"

"That's a shine for a cloudy day!"

But Nacha had lost consciousness of everything about her. Her eyes were heavy with sleep. She sagged forward in her chair, till her head rested on her arms, and, still at the table there, she fell fast asleep.

It was late the next day when she woke in bed; and the servant was bringing her a note from Arnedo. In it he explained that he did not care to have her remain a moment longer under his roof, that she was free to go to Monsalvat or to whomever she preferred. With the message he enclosed a hundred *peso* bill.

Nacha read the letter without emotion. Her first thought was one of shame at the spectacle she must have made the night before. As for Arnedo, she was glad to have her relations with him end in this fashion. A sudden and immediate break—yes, that was better! It was clear he was still fond of her, otherwise he would have told her

to go himself, or have had the servant put her out. Consideration for her feelings to such an extent as the letter showed was an incredible act of delicacy on Pampa's part, had he been serious! She was tempted to remain, just to go him one better. But no! She was through with Pampa and his kind. Monsalvat had told her she was a good, a noble woman, at heart. Could she not be, if she tried? Try she would, at any rate.

She wrote a few words to her former lover, assuring him that she bore him no ill-will, and returning the hundred *pesos*. Then she quietly packed her belongings, dressed, had her trunk carried downstairs, and getting into a cab, gave the driver the address of a boarding-house she had selected from a list in the *Patria*. "Strictly respectable," the advertisement had declared. Nacha felt quite elated now. To herself she seemed to have already gone a long way on the road to respectability.

CHAPTER IX

THE shock of his mother's death, and quite as much the story of Eugenia she had told, left Monsalvat for some days in a veritable stupor. He just let himself live on, listlessly yielding to the stream of passing hours much as water-grasses in mid-river bend and curl to the current. His mind was a blank, incapable of thinking, unresponsive alike to memory and to hope. At intervals, indeed, in some chance moment of awakened introspection, it occurred to him that this present spiritual passivity must be very like Nacha's habitual condition—a barely conscious drift down the course of events, thoughtless, will-less, purposeless.

But such spiritual torpor could not last long in a man of Monsalvat's vigor. Eventually he began to feel the need of action, and two immediate projects seemed to present themselves: he must find his sister, and he must attend to the restoration of his tenements.

One morning the broker he had commissioned to execute the mortgage announced that he had drawn up the necessary papers, and that they were ready for his signature. A bank was advancing forty thousand *pesos* on the security of the improved property. Monsalvat gaily hurried to announce the news to his tenants. To his surprise

he saw no results of the various measures toward cleaning up which he had suggested to the janitor.

"Why didn't you carry out my orders?" he asked the latter, a lean, loose-jointed immigrant from Aragon, whose arms bobbed up and down against his enormously wide hips as he talked with a slightly Andalusian lisp that had the intention of humor in it.

"I have, sir, I have. But these people—why, sir, what can a fellow do with them? Take a look at them! Born pigs, pigs they will remain."

His labored jocularity failed, however, in quite concealing the uneasiness the man was feeling at this unexpected visit from his employer. As Monsalvat started for the door of the tenement the janitor resumed:

"Going to talk to them? What's the use? They'll only lie to you. What such folks need is the stick, I'm telling you, and not kind words, nor favors."

But brushing him aside, Monsalvat went on into one of the apartments on the ground floor, the door of which was open. In it lived an Italian, with his wife and two children. The man, a laborer on some municipal building job, was away at work. Monsalvat asked the woman if the superintendent had conveyed his orders to her.

"There! Didn't I tell you?" the janitor commented triumphantly, at the reply that he had not. And he added, with a burst of ill-natured laughter, "The people, the sovereign people—pah!"

Monsalvat invited the fellow to leave him alone with the tenant.

"How much did you pay this month?" he inquired when the man was gone.

Foreseeing a raise in her rent, the woman put her apron to her eyes and began wailing about the poverty, debts, and sickness in her family. Monsalvat repeated his question.

"Twenty *pesos,*" she replied, trembling.

Monsalvat had ordered his caretaker to reduce the rents by a half, and his face flashed with anger. The woman, however, misinterpreted her landlord's expression, which she thought due to surprise at the smallness of the sum. Now, surely, he was going to raise the rent. Oh, this America!

So from apartment to apartment Monsalvat went on pushing his inquiries. Some of the tenants were not in, but he managed to visit a dozen or more of them. It was the same story everywhere. He hurried down to the superintendent's quarters and ordered him to assemble all the tenants in the courtyard. When they had gathered there, he denounced the trickery of his agent and discharged him on the spot.

"Your rents are reduced by one-half," he then explained to the crowd. "But this will not be for long, because I am going to make some expensive alterations. I want you to be comfortable in clean homes, with plenty of air and sunlight. I want you to live like human beings, and not like animals. When the contractors begin work here you will probably have to move to some other house; but later when this building has been made a fit and pleasant place to live in, you can return here."

To his astonishment, his words were welcomed with no enthusiasm whatever. Instead of pleasing his listeners, indeed he seemed to have insulted them. Some commented with a shrug of their shoulders; others began whispering together. One old woman burst out weeping. A man who talked with a Galician accent voiced the protest that was in all their minds. They were being put out of the house, just as a pretext for higher rents afterwards. Calling the man by name, Monsalvat tried to explain.

"Don't you understand? I am thinking only of your own good. If you live under hygienic conditions, with plenty of air and light, you will have less sickness, and lose less time from your work. Life will be that much easier for you, anyway."

But the man did not understand. If they were satisfied, why force on them something they did not ask for? They lived like pigs? Well, had they ever lived any other way? Hygiene and air were all right for rich people. But poor folks had always gotten along without air; and as for hygiene,—what was hygiene anyway but some new fad of the white-collared crowd? Anyway, if poor people had a hard life, the rich needn't try to improve it with their uplift. Everybody knew only too well what rich people were like. If they were easy with you one moment, it was only to take it out on you at some other time. Mr. Landlord could leave them alone with his lower rents and his remodelled tenements. They wouldn't have the lower rents, and they wouldn't move a stick or stone out of there.

The Galician looked defiantly at Monsalvat as he talked. His auditors, evidently a majority of the tenants in the building, loudly applauded his concluding words.

"He's right! He's right!"

And Monsalvat saw more than one hostile glance coming his way. Disheartened now, he did not care to reply. What could he say that he had not said? Merely assuring them again that the month's rent for each apartment would be ten *pesos* instead of twenty, he went away, leaving his tenants to continue discussing their grievances together.

As he walked toward his lodgings, he tried to convince himself that this incident was not a proper cause for discouragement; that, on the contrary, it emphasized the need of going on, of struggling with these people, even against their wills, for their own good. Their ignorance was the natural consequence of such absorbing poverty. When had culture ever existed apart from a certain amount of material wellbeing? And how really poor in every sense were these unfortunate tenants of his; their minds dulled by the grind of daily toil, their vision blurred to the most obvious beauties of life. It was understandable, indeed, that they should mistrust everything, even the best intentions of people who really had their welfare at heart. But he was sure of his road now; all doubt and faltering had left him. The difficulties he encountered only spurred him to new energy and a light was shining in his heart.

He had reached the steps leading up to his

house when someone, from a carriage window, beckoned to him to stop. It was Ruiz de Castro, smart, dapper, gloved and perfumed as usual, bearing himself with his customary correctness and as always looking quite the conqueror. And following him out of his conveyance came Ercasty, who greeted Monsalvat with an affected courtesy quite in contrast with his obvious annoyance at this encounter.

"My dear fellow," Ruiz exclaimed, "you have no idea what an uproar you caused the other night. I have been busy apologizing for you ever since." And he laughed with his characteristic mannerliness, trying to appear amused as though it were all a joke. The doctor, however, eyed Monsalvat with aggressive hauteur, gazing skyward with intentional rudeness, whenever Fernando began to speak.

"Certainly it would never have occurred to anyone but Fernando Monsalvat to defend those women seriously." Castro continued: "All the ladies have decided you must be the wildest libertine in Buenos Aires. Something of a reputation, eh?"

"The injustice of such an inference must be rather obvious," said Monsalvat. "It offends me, however, only in the abstract, as something wrong, and therefore ugly. So far as I am concerned personally, it is nothing to me at all.

"I shall continue being what I am—regardless of what people think." The doctor, much annoyed, suddenly abandoned his passive attitude. It was incompatible with his veneration for "soci-

ety" to admit that an individual could be other than what "society" declared him to be.

"That is sheer nonsense," he broke in aggressively. "What counts is public opinion. A man is, in any practical sense, exactly and only what people consider him to be."

Monsalvat took no notice of the interruption.

"I am not sorry that I spoke up in defense of those poor women," he said, addressing his remarks to Ruiz de Castro alone. "I assure you, we do not know them. To us they seem like animals, things without souls, without personalities. Well, we're wrong. They are human beings. They feel, and love, and hate, like any one of us. But even though it should not be so, granted they are virtually animals, whose fault is it?"

"It's idiotic to blame society for the manner of living of these people," the doctor asserted roundly. "They behave as they do because they are degenerates."

"No, not degenerates: victims! Many of them try to work. Pitiful salaries, with debts they can't avoid, drive them into the power of vice. A few of them may, indeed, be degenerates—offspring of feeble-minded or alcoholic parents for whom, in a more roundabout way, we are perhaps just as much to blame. But, on the whole, the cause of the social evil, as of other evils, is in me, in Ruiz, in you, in the man going by there in that automobile, in the factory owner, in the store proprietor, in the criminal laws which give a sanction to economic injustice, in our moral ideas, in our conceptions of life—in our civilization, in short. The

fact is, we have no human sympathy, no sense of justice, no pity. Countless numbers of these poor girls might still be saved, because they have not yet completely lost their self-respect. But what have we ever done to rehabilitate one of them? Do we ever go into the places where they live with any purpose but a shameful one? Do we ever extend the hand of Christian fellowship to the outcast? Can any one of us say that he has never, even by tacit complicity, helped to bring about the degradation of any woman? No, we are all the accomplices, witting and unwitting, of an infinitude of crimes. And yet those girls are our sisters; creatures, as people say, with souls to save, unfortunates feeling the same call to life that we all feel, and, like all of us, destined to the death that engulfs all our hopes and all our sorrows. . . ."

Ruiz de Castro, from temper of mind, and in spite of the circumstances in which life placed him, was not insensible to an idealistic appeal. His face showed the impression Monsalvat's words made on him. Not so his companion, however, who in this case, as in all others, was quite indifferent as to whether Monsalvat was right or not. For him the important point was that the whole discussion annoyed him, as something improper, in bad taste. It was Ercasty's belief that an educated man like Monsalvat, a "gentleman" in other words, ought to have the ideas and sentiments of his class. In defending workmen and prostitutes, and other kinds of low people, Monsalvat, in his opinion, was behaving like a vulgar plebeia. The doctor would have conceded to anyone the right to de-

fend such unfortunates in the conventional way—with condescending charitableness, or with witty paradoxes; but this fellow was talking like a social agitator; attacking society, insulting class, ignoring tradition. What were policemen's clubs for except to use on such dangerous lunatics? As Ruiz and his companion bowed him a cold "good day," Monsalvat went up toward his front door. Chancing to turn around before going in, he caught a glimpse of the doctor still sputtering abuse in his direction. For his own part he pitied the man, with that exultant sense of superiority which a new vision brings.

As it was still only eleven o'clock, he decided to go at once to the house where his mother had lived, for a further talk with Moreno. At the door he met the latter's daughter. Monsalvat had first noticed Irene Moreno the night of his mother's death, and he had taken a liking to her. She had been so gentle, so affectionate towards Aquilina Severin, so skilful in tending her, so ready to do anything she could. The sight of the poor child now caused him a most painful impression: slight of frame, but graceful, nervous, agile, under a shock of almost blonde hair, she seemed a pretty little flower that was being trampled upon, bruised and soiled in that life of the tenements. To atone for the utter incompetence of the father, she and her mother sewed, embroidered, and in other ways made frantic efforts to assemble the pennies needed for the daily bread of that household. To Irene fell the care of her six younger brothers and sis-

ters; and it was she who delivered her mother's and her own needle work at the stores.

"I am going next door for a moment," the girl replied to a question from Monsalvat, looking up at him shyly out of her dark, steel blue eyes. "There is a woman there who has just lost her little boy. He was only two years old. The poor thing is a widow and has no work."

"Won't you take her something from me—from us both?"

"I have something already," Irene answered. Knowing the circumstances of the Moreno family, Monsalvat wondered how much such alms could amount to; and Irene, though much embarrassed by his insistence, could not evade confessing that she was taking the woman one *peso,* the total of her ready cash. Monsalvat put into her hand all the money he had in his pocket, not daring, however, to suggest that she keep that poor little *peso* for herself. Then he followed her back into the Moreno apartment. Moreno was out, as usual. That systematic ne'er-do-well was scarcely ever at home if he were sober enough to be elsewhere. His wife, too, was absent, for the moment, trying, as Irene explained, to place her eldest son as an errand boy somewhere. With the children running in and out, hungry, squawling, half-naked, the rooms were in a disorder, which Irene, visibly troubled at being taken thus unawares, kept trying to excuse, betraying her uneasiness further by a constant fluttering of the eyelids which, to Monsalvat, somehow seemed particularly appealing.

Monsalvat turned the conversation, as soon as

possible, upon the subject of his sister, whom Irene said she also had known. "Eugenia was such a generous girl," she added. "I grew to be very, very fond of her. And she dressed so wonderfully! People said she had piles of money. But she was always doing something for somebody. She never forgot to bring us some little present whenever she called on Aquilina; and I remember, too, that she never went away without telling me to be a good girl. That always amused me. But Eugenia was so pretty!"

"And did she ever mention me?" Monsalvat asked anxiously.

"Yes," said Irene, "often! Though she seemed to feel you did not much approve of her."

"And where is she now? Do you think your father will really find her?"

Irene reddened, and seemed reluctant to answer. When Fernando repeated his question she replied that her father certainly did not know where Eugenia was. No one did, for that matter, as Eugenia never would tell her address. Moreno was just trying to get money out of Monsalvat. "And please don't give him any more," she begged. "He only drinks it up, and he always makes a lot of trouble for us here in the house when he gets drunk."

In Irene's opinion, it was useless to look for Eugenia. No one had any idea as to where she was living. It would be better just to wait. She would turn up sooner or later to see her mother. Then they would tell her about the poor woman's

death, and let her know that her brother was anxious to see her.

"And tell her, too, as simply as you can, Irene, that I hold nothing against her; and that I want her to come and live with me."

Monsalvat spoke with an emotion which, without his being aware of it, found a responsive chord in Irene's starved little heart. As their eyes chanced to meet, Monsalvat divined that this poor child was in love with him.

"And you," he exclaimed, "why haven't you some kind of work?"

"I've looked for work, outside, but without much success. We take in sewing, you see, mother and I. She knows how to embroider, and she is teaching me how to do it. But we make so little at it."

Irene's eyes filled with tears, as memories of her hardships rose before her. While Monsalvat sat silent, moved by what he heard, she told him that Moreno sometimes beat her; but that was nothing to the agony she endured when the children cried with hunger.

"I can't bear it. It breaks my heart to hear them."

And she began to sob. Monsalvat tried to comfort her, and talked to her awhile, as a brother might. Suddenly he got up to leave. Nacha's image, persistent and irresistible, was taking possession of him. Irene gave a quick glance at him and saw that he was going. Seizing his hand, she threw herself on the ground before him.

"Take me with you!" she cried. "I will be

your servant, your slave, anything you wish, because I know you will help mother and father—and the children. It will be your bread they eat. Only take me away, please. I love you, I respect you. If you don't take me, what's to become of me? I'll go away with the first man who comes along. Yes, I will! I'll be like Eugenia—but at least the family won't starve."

"Please get up," said Monsalvat, embarrassed. They stood facing one another. Saddened and silent, he looked at her.

"A year ago I would have taken you with me, Irene. Now it is impossible. But you don't need to humiliate yourself to persuade me to help your people. They shall have everything I can give them. Now, promise me you will not do anything foolish. I shall be your friend, and come to see you."

Irene, without replying, went into a corner of the room, and began to weep heart-rendingly. What could he do? Profoundly distressed, Monsalvat went away.

All day the thought of Irene troubled him; but towards evening he decided he must make two calls: one upon Nacha, the other upon Torres. It was impossible to wait longer; he must see Nacha, and as to Torres, he needed his help in looking for Eugenia.

He went to Nacha's apartment. His jerk at the bell brought him suddenly face to face with Arnedo. He turned cold. . . . The latter surveyed him from head to foot, in utter astonishment.

"So it's true she was carrying on with you, is

it? What did you come here for? To find her? Don't you know I threw her out ten days ago? She's probably running around the streets, like the rest of her kind."

He tried to make his tone scornful; he did not want to betray the anger Monsalvat's presence aroused in him. But Monsalvat had recovered his self-command. Quite serenely he declared that he had had nothing to do with Nacha. The proof of this was that he had not until that moment known that she had left. If there had been anything between them, wasn't it rather strange that ten days should pass without their seeing one another?

"Just the same," said Arnedo, yielding to this argument, "you have no business to come here. And you can get out at once. If you don't, I'll throw you down those stairs!"

Monsalvat was unruffled. He looked into Arnedo's eyes with so quiet and peaceable an expression that the latter could not but restrain his violence.

"Why do you take things that way?" said Monsalvat. "I wish you would listen to me with a little patience. I did come to see Nacha, not with the intentions you may have supposed, but for her good. I know that she wants to lead a decent life. Don't you think it is only just and human to encourage her? If you have ever cared for her, don't stand in her way now! At least let her save herself, if she can!"

Arnedo listened, his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ground. At first he wanted to laugh; for this all seemed so ridiculous, and sentimental.

But suddenly he became serious, as though Monsalvat's words were sinking in.

"But it isn't only on Nacha's account that I came. I also wanted to talk with you. I wanted to ask you where Eugenia Monsalvat is."

He spoke gravely and in a tone which seemed to make an impression on the young *patotero*.

"My mother has died, and she asked me to look for her. I want to keep my promise that I would. No one knows where my sister is, Arnedo. Do me a kindness and tell me."

"I don't know where she is. If I find out . . ."

As they parted, they shook hands. Arnedo was beginning to understand Monsalvat. He knew that this man, who seemed to have forgotten the scene in the cabaret, was no coward; that there was in him something that he had known in no one else. He went with Fernando to the elevator and again shook hands with him.

Monsalvat found Torres in his office. In order not to add to his friend's shame and grief, the doctor listened without looking up. Monsalvat had found it easy enough to speak of his sister to Arnedo; but to speak of her to Torres—what an effort it cost him! And he had something even harder to do; he must tell him he was also looking for Nacha. Torres would think that he was in love with the girl, and perhaps laugh. Yet, when Monsalvat, with a tremendous effort, told him that there was need of finding Nacha, too, Torres gravely replied that Nacha must be found.

For he, too, was beginning to understand Monsalvat.

CHAPTER X

THE boarding house to which Nacha had fled belonged to an old maid of French extraction known as Mlle. Dupont. This elderly landlady quite won Nacha's heart with her amiability and delicate ways, her politeness and her unquestionable respectability. Poor Nacha had never in her whole life been so well treated; the years she had last lived through had prepared her to be particularly surprised and pleased by the attentions with which she now found herself surrounded. She attributed to kindliness and goodness of heart the courtesies which were due to "Mademoiselle's" punctilious ceremoniousness; and she thought that her landlady did her a great honor in demonstrating so much affection for her.

As a matter of fact, Mlle. Dupont had as many wrinkles in her soul as on her face. Her apparent amiability expressed itself chiefly in certain phrases of endearment or pity such as *ma petite, ma chérie, Oh, quel malheur!* and others of the same nature. To hear her, one might have thought that to this sensitive being everything was delicious, enchanting, exquisite, worthy of compassion or sympathy. The daughter of Bayonne Protestants, she had turned Catholic, and was, at bottom, a narrow, egotistic, rather ridiculous old woman. She treated all her

boarders as she treated Nacha, and was prodigal to them of similar amenities. She must have been about forty-five; but she looked more than fifty. She was tall, angular, stiff in her movements, with masculine features, and hair and eyebrows of a reddish cast. Her nose was sharply molded, and her hair, combed high in an ancient style, covering the greater part of her forehead and her ears, and hanging down the sides in ringlets that were not always in curl, gave her a somewhat ludicrous appearance. When she wished to appear particularly sweet-natured, she would lean ceremoniously toward the person addressing her, all the while smiling and blinking her small eyes.

Mlle. Dupont would quite frequently visit Nacha in her room.

"Always alone!" she would exclaim, clasping her hands, and shaking her head. "Would you care for a little company?"

"Yes, indeed; I'd be delighted!"

Then she would sit down beside Nacha and tell her what a fancy she had taken to her, and how she hoped she would never leave her house, and how much she enjoyed her.

"You are such a good girl, Nacha!"

"Oh, 'good,' Mademoiselle!"

Her landlady continued in eulogistic strain; and then came the moment for exchanging confidences! She wanted to know "everything" about her new friend, about her family, about the kind of work she had done, and what she lived on. . . . Nacha trembled before this curiosity. What should she reply? Such questions from anyone else would have

annoyed her; but in "Mademoiselle's" case they seemed prompted by the affection she professed for her new friend, and a desire to be useful to her, and to know her better.

"Why do you want to know?" Nacha would ask.

"Oh, Mlle. Nacha! Nothing! Nothing at all! You wouldn't believe me if I told you—it's just because I'm so fond of you, you are so good, so—how shall I say—so innocent!"

Nacha reddened. Mlle. Dupont, watching her out of the corner of her eye, and a little constrained, reddened also. "Oh, I can tell at a glance! You are not like some of the other girls I have known. As for me I admire goodness so much that I cannot understand how some women . . . I don't know how it is! . . . you see I was brought up on very religious principles; and I can't help having such high standards about character that I really can't endure the thought of the slightest slip. . . . No, I always say; let a woman have all the faults she likes: but let her morals at least be above reproach!"

Nacha, terrified, was wondering if "Mademoiselle" knew anything about her life; but she could only conclude that her being allowed to remain under that roof at all proved that her hostess was in total ignorance of her history. All these declarations of lofty principles and integrity of character, confirmed by the obvious austerity of her daily life, caused poor Nacha to look upon Mlle. Dupont as a superior being. Here at last was someone worthy of her intense admiration! She went so far as to try to model her conduct upon that of her landlady, and avoided going out, believing that temptation

and vice hovered outside the precincts of that house of refuge.

So she remained all day long in her room, going over the incidents of the day just passed, dreaming, wondering who Monsalvat could be, and what he wanted of her. Was he really what he appeared? Or had he practised a miserable deception on her, making use of his eloquent words to get her away from Arnedo, for his own advantage? This was not impossible; for to men all means are justified when the end is the woman their caprice has fastened upon. And she could not doubt that she was pleasing to Monsalvat. She remembered how he had looked at her, the first time they had ever seen one another, in the cabaret; he had followed her to the house—he had gone again to the cabaret to see her—and then how he had defended her! It couldn't be merely out of pity that he had risked incurring the insults and the violence of the *patota!* Does a man take such risks except for love? No, there could be no doubt: he was in love with her. . . .

But, did she want him to be? What was the strange feeling she had for the man? Love or hate? Sometimes she thought she loved him with all the strength of her being; but when she remembered that she was now without resources, and that she would sooner or later be forced to have recourse to the means of livelihood so loathsome to her, she hated him. Why had he come to her house to torment her? Why had he spoken to her that way, knowing as he must that a woman of her kind is an outcast, and cannot change the manner of life

that makes her so? Was he perhaps a lunatic, who took pleasure in doing her harm? Her head swam with all these questions and uncertainties. Then again at times she reproached herself for having driven Monsalvat away. How happy it made her even to remember that he had thought they might be friends!

Meanwhile Nacha was living on the money she had raised by pawning a few jewels. She was sorry now not to have accepted the sum Arnedo had offered her. Why so many scruples about accepting money? They became her strangely! Mlle. Dupont required payment in advance; so that she had had to part with a small brooch on the very day of her arrival in the boarding house. The jewels she still possessed were of a very modest sort and would scarcely provide her with means for even a month.

When she left Arnedo's apartment it was not with the intention of trying to lead a decent life. Convinced that she could not help being what she was, she had resolved to go on making a living as before. But now two things held her back; the memory of Monsalvat, and her regard for Mlle. Dupont. Never, while in that house, could she fall short of her "Mademoiselle's" ideals! The Frenchwoman's eloquence on the subject of "character" had impressed her. She felt the charm and the tranquillity of living respectably; and it was not merely the happy freedom from remorse which soothed her: the decency within her seemed, at last, to have found a home.

More helpful than anything else, however, was

the thought of Monsalvat. In spite of her apparent evasion, he had conquered her, leaving on her spirit an ineffaceable imprint. Simply remembering him made it impossible for her to take up again her shameful profession; and when, hard pressed by need of money, or by habit of mind, she thought of yielding, Monsalvat's image appearing before her, imperious yet kind, strengthened her impulse to resist.

A month and a half passed while Nacha lived on in a beclouded dream, completely inactive. She got up at eleven, lunched with the other boarders, spent the afternoon in an easy chair, dreaming, reading, letting her somewhat indolent imagination wander; or she would lend herself to confidential chats with "Mademoiselle." She almost never went out. In the evening, after dinner, she joined the other boarders at their card games, and then went to bed late.

She did not care to call on her friends, for fear they would drop in to see her and compromise her with "Mademoiselle." Sometimes she thought she would go out to try to discover Monsalvat's whereabouts; but she knew nothing of his occupations, his associates, or the places he frequented. She felt certain that his being in the cabaret was quite accidental, and that, as he could scarcely hope to see her there, he would never go back.

She had spoken of him with some of the other people in the house, but they knew nothing she did not already know. One of them mentioned having read an article of Monsalvat's in the *Patria,* and Nacha telephoned to the newspaper office to ask

for Monsalvat's address. However, no one there knew it.

On the few occasions when Nacha went out it was with Mlle. Dupont. One afternoon the latter insisted on Nacha's accompanying her to a "meeting." Nacha, curious, and eager for diversion, accepted the invitation, and together, they drove to a house in Independence Street. On the door Nacha saw a sign bearing a proper name and under it the legend "Happiness taught here." Beyond this door, in a room of small size, were several benches and chairs, occupied by a scattering of people. An individual, who looked like a gipsy, was standing before this audience addressing it. Just as Nacha and Mlle. Dupont came in, he gave the order "Grand Chain!" and Nacha could not help laughing at this reminiscence of a country dance. "Mademoiselle" looked solemn reproof at her. The participants in the performance, men and women, as soon as they heard these words, took hold of hands and stood in a circle until the gipsy-like performer, with a sanctimonious air, announced that "the spirit" had taken possession of him. One of the audience asked the spirit several questions, which the man answered in a faint, doleful, ghostly voice that seemed to come from beyond the tomb. When the questions were disposed of, Nacha, who had been frightened at first, wanted to speak with Riga. If she could only ask him what she should do! but she did not dare. Besides it was late and the man announced that the sèance was over.

After their return to the house Nacha and Mlle. Dupont could talk of nothing but the spiritualist

meeting. Mademoiselle was a fervent believer in all such manifestations, which did not prevent her being an extremely devout Catholic, and the esteemed friend of some French priests who frequently called upon her. Nacha inquired of "Mademoiselle" if spirits knew everything.

"*Ah, mais oui!* Everything—the past, the future, what one ought to do—they can tell you everything, *ma, chère!*"

"They are better than cards then? Or fortune tellers?"

"Oh, much better, cards sometimes lie, but spirits, never, *ma petite,* never! How could a spirit lie! *Mais ce n'est pas possible, mon amour!*"

Nacha liked to have her fortune read from cards at frequent intervals. Now she thought she would prefer to talk with Riga, the "professor of happiness" acting as medium. Riga would not lie to her. Nevertheless, on the two or three other occasions when she went to a spiritualist séance she had not the courage to ask that Riga's spirit be summoned. It was not so much shyness nor shame which held her back, as fear—Riga would be sure to reproach her for her manner of living. . . .

But one day a strange thing happened! Nacha unwittingly came upon Mlle. Dupont in circumstances so compromising to that lady that Nacha, confused, and distressed, thought only of relieving her friend's embarrassment. Nothing, thought Nacha, but her entire confidence could show Mlle. Dupont that she still held her in high regard. So, swayed by a generous impulse, she told her hostess the story of her own life. And when she had done

so Mlle. Dupont turned upon her with a request for the month's rent!

Another crumbled illusion! Nacha wept bitterly over its ruins. It was faith in this woman's strength which had helped her all this while to resist despair; now she had lost the only refuge she knew in the whole world; and tomorrow she would lose what would cost her more than either of these: she would lose hope in herself. She would have to go back to the world which had doomed her to a disreputable life, which would allow her to live no other. . . .

She decided, however, before taking any other measure to meet Mlle. Dupont's demands for money, to call on Torres for help. But, the next day, early in the morning, the servant told her that one of the priests who frequently called on Mlle. Dupont wanted to speak to her. Nacha went to the parlor. Father Duchaine, round of figure and of face, sat there waiting for her. His gestures too were round, as were his short fat fingers; and he spoke with a round little mouth. Nacha did not conceal her astonishment at this unexpected call.

"Mademoiselle, the fact is. . . ."

He stood, apparently searching for words with which to state the fact, gazing at the floor, placing his right hand on his mouth, and taking it away when his meaning required the elucidation of a circle described by a fat arm in the air.

"You know Mademoiselle! Such a saint! Her parents, although they were not Catholics, were good people, God-fearing, virtue-loving. Providence was watching over our dear Mademoiselle! When they died, her aunt, a good religious woman,

took her to live with her; and in this aunt's house Mademoiselle became a convert."

Nacha, gazing wide-eyed at the priest, wondered what this was all about.

"Well, you know, you understand of course—in short, it seems that your life has not been exactly—what can I say—exemplary! Perhaps I am not clear. . . . You know, you understand, that in this house . . . where . . . how shall I put it? . . ."

His eyes rolled upward, and he wriggled in search of elusive phrases. His arm beat the air when suddenly the desired words slipped into place, and beaming, he exclaimed, "where virtue is crystal pure! You see that you . . . with your way of living . . . and no . . . that is to say . . . well, it really will not do for you to remain here! . . ."

"You mean, she is putting me out of the house!" exclaimed Nacha, with indignation.

"Ah! . . . You understand. . . . Yes, you understand—precisely! . . ."

"Very well, I shall go today. Now be so kind as to leave me."

The priest made a well rounded bow, and went out. Scarcely had he set foot in the hall than he returned, for he had heard Nacha calling him.

"You wish. . . ?"

Nacha had for a moment thought of throwing more light on the "crystal pure" virtue to which the priest had alluded. She would have enjoyed the relief of striking out once at least at the perversity and hypocrisy her landlady represented. . . .

"What is it, señorita?"

But Nacha suddenly felt that such vengeance was

a small piece of business. No, it was not in her to be petty in this fashion! Let this woman put her out on the street; let her tell her priests what Nacha had told her in confidence in order to console her; let her do what she would! She, at least, Nacha Regules, could not betray to anyone what she had promised never to reveal!

"Nothing, Father! Leave me, please!"

She went to her room, dressed as carefully as the day before, and went out to the street. There she took a passing taxi, giving the chauffeur the address of a boarding house in Lavalle Street. She would never be asked if her past life had been "exemplary" before being admitted to lodge in this house!

CHAPTER XI

MME. ANNETTE'S house, facing a well-known park, was the most aristocratic of its kind in all Buenos Aires. It was a resort of millionaires, prominent politicians, and representatives of the city's best families. At times half the cabinet was to be found there, not, of course, assembled in council. Public report had it that when the Chamber of Deputies lacked a quorum, it was customary to telephone to Mme. Annette's; and never had this measure, unparliamentary though it might be, failed to produce satisfactory results. At the very entrance one began to breathe an air of luxury; then one stepped into a world of silks, embroideries, gilt furniture, rich rugs, and heavy hangings. A persistent aroma of rose water was wafted through the rooms, where a subdued, mysterious, light invited to low-voiced conversation.

Nacha was waiting in a small inner reception room. A woman, whom she did not know, was also sitting there; "Madame" had left them for a moment to receive a caller. Suddenly a familiar figure appeared in the doorway. "Amelia!" Nacha, with an exclamation of surprise, ran to meet her friend, and kissed her.

"You here! Why, didn't you get married?" She lowered her voice at the question. Amelia

might feel ashamed in the presence of the strange woman. . . .

"Yes, I got married. . . . But . . . here I am just the same!"

She talked in a very loud voice, laughed boldly, and emphasized whatever she had to say with graceful movements of her snake-like body and her long thin arms. She was dressed in a somewhat fantastic and exuberant fashion, not without elegance. A strong scent of violets pervaded the atmosphere about her.

"I should worry!" she continued; "Listen, little one. I'll admit that when I got married I had some idea of living respectably. That's the truth. You can say what you like. But you don't know what I married. He used to work when he was a bachelor—in a dry goods store. But after we were married he left his job, and wanted to live on me—thought I could go right on doing what I did before. Well, this is what I said to him: I said, "All right. I'll go back to the old life; but feed you with the money I earn? Not much! So here I am. How do I look? Not getting old very fast, eh?"

"You look splendid, Amelia, and more attractive than ever. What a figure you have!"

"It isn't so bad, is it? But it's wasted on the old fogies who come here. It makes you tired. Say, do you remember the wild times we had, Nacha, when we were just kids, and I called myself an anarchist, and said everybody ought to have one good fling at life?"

"And aren't you an anarchist now?"

"Me? You're crazy, little one. No more of

those fool ideas for me. Listen, I'm convinced now that we girls of the profession are one of the strongest pillars of society. . . ."

She flung this out in ringing tones; and then, at Nacha's horrified expression, burst out laughing, throwing herself over to one side of her chair with the sensuous grace and calm indifference of a cat.

Madame's arrival interrupted this conversation. When she saw Amelia she greeted her with flattering warmth, and immediately left the room with her. The stranger looked at Nacha and seemed about to speak. But Nacha was lost in wonderment over all the things that may drive a woman to her ruin. Amelia was frankness itself, and if she said she had married with the hope of leading a decent life, it must be true; so then it was her husband, on whom she had built all her hopes of decency, who had thrust her back into vice!

She was interrupted in her thoughts by the entrance of a very young girl, at whom Nacha gazed, charmed and astonished by the grace, and innocent expression, of this delightful little person. She could not take her eyes away from her; the girl, answering her shy smile, asked, simply,

"What's your name? You look so good!"

"I'm not good, but I should like to be!"

The child—she seemed no older—sat down beside Nacha, and began to talk with her. Although she was actually seventeen, her slight, almost frail, figure made her seem barely fourteen or fifteen. Nacha was horrified by this little creature's presence in that place. Didn't her parents know where she was? And how could Mme. Annette let her

come there? And the men, those respectable gentlemen who were such good friends of Madame's, how could they fail to utter a word of protest or of pity? No, she could not understand the world; for it despised her and all women like her, insulted her and pushed her towards crime and every form of misery; yet she was capable of feeling pity for the girl at her side; and she knew many women of her sort who would not have allowed a horror such as this child's presence there, to be committed. She wanted to ask this young thing to tell her how she came to be in such a place, but she hesitated. The other woman's presence embarrassed her.

"Tell me," Nacha whispered, taking the girl's hand. "Why is it—how does it happen that—?"

The child raised her clear innocent eyes to Nacha's, in wonder.

"Why do you come to this house?" Nacha asked finally, blushing for her curiosity.

The girl raised troubled eyes to Nacha; then she replied quite simply, without the slightest suggestion of reproach toward anyone in her voice:

"My aunt sends me."

"And how long have you been coming here?"

"Two months."

"And before that—you had a sweetheart? Who deceived you?"

"No, I never had a sweetheart. My aunt made me come—"

"I can't believe it! So this is what life has become for you! Why, you ought to be out playing with other children.

"Yes."

Nacha could scarcely breathe for indignation. Then little by little, she brought out the child's story.

About eight years before, the girl's aunt had visited her parents, who were Spanish and lived in great poverty in La Coruña. This aunt was rich, and owned a store in Buenos Aires. Her little niece attracted her; and as the child's parents had ten other children, they gave her up to what seemed to them a prosperous future. Her aunt took her back with her, always treated her kindly; but the store no longer prospered, and finally, she was forced to close it. She told her little niece one day that they were so poor she would have to earn some money.

"We hadn't anything to eat," the child went on. "I didn't see what my aunt could do. And I didn't know what the place was she was sending me to. So I came, as she told me. But when I went home I cried, and said to my aunt I couldn't come to this house any more. . . . My aunt begged me to be brave, and told me that she was responsible for everything. But—it seemed so bad to me! I felt everything was all wrong. But my aunt says that when people do what they are forced to do, they are not really bad. . . . Can that be true? Tell me what you think?"

Nacha overwhelmed with horror, did not know what to reply.

"And is it wrong?"

Mme. Annette came in at this point and took the girl away with her. Nacha got up from her chair and rushed after them; but from the threshold of

the room into which Madame had swept, she caught sight of a man and stopped short. Then she came back to the strange woman, towards whom, until this moment, she had felt a slight hostility.

"What a shame that is!" she broke out. "I have never in my life heard anything like that child's story. Exploited by her own aunt!"

"Don't be so angry," said the woman gently, as Nacha, beside herself with indignation, sat down.

"It's no good complaining. I have seen so many awful things that nothing shocks me, absolutely nothing!"

Her words were correct but had a foreign accent. She was neither pretty nor well dressed; but she had marvellous blue eyes, and looked intelligent. Nacha, who until then had scarcely noticed her, now felt strongly attracted to her; and as they waited there they talked with increasing confidence to one another. Nacha learned that she was of a respected and well known family of a town in northern France, and that she had come to South America under contract to give some concerts. But the theatres in which her manager required her to sing were of such a kind—the Royal, for instance—that she refused. She had, however, no resources, so finally she made terms with the company, and was taken to a *"pension d'artistes,"* at which she was expected to live. She soon found out what sort of a *"pension"* it was, and rebelled against the conditions of life there. After leaving the place abruptly, she tried to earn a living by working in an art shop. The usual temptations followed. Then came a love affair with one of its patrons: it ended badly. . . .

She smiled ironically as she looked at the tangled skein of her memories.

"When I think of my parents," she continued, "I am very unhappy. I would give my life to see them —but it costs so much to go to Europe!"

Madame came bustling in.

"Nacha, will you come, please. I want to introduce you to an old friend of the house—a good friend. Let me see—are you well dressed? Your stockings might be better. Next time do be careful about your foot-wear."

Nacha was about to address her, but Madame began again:

"Be a good girl, child. You're pretty enough—and you have pretty manners, too, I know you have, when you want to!"

Leaving Nacha under the august protection of a venerable "father of his country," Madame took up a position on the balcony of one of the rooms facing the street, and began peering with great interest through the branches of the trees in the park; for it was time for her little daughter to come home from the convent where she was being instructed in all the virtues and accomplishments befitting a young lady of the wealthy classes. And Madame dreamed a little of this tender offspring who, in a few years, if all her schemes went well, would be happily married, and highly respected; and she would owe this happiness to her mother's skill in managing a business that had no equal in Buenos Aires;—on the champagne alone she made a hundred pesos a day! Yes, "Madame" flattered herself that she knew the value of institutions; with her

talent for managing, her tact, and her French ways, she had succeeded in accumulating a large fortune —thanks to the support and approval of Politics, Finance and Aristocracy!

A commotion behind her interrupted her reveries. She turned and saw the worthy senator, now sputtering with rage. His story was soon told. With a flounce "Madame" hurried out to find Nacha who had fled to the little reception room, empty now, where she was standing in front of a mirror, arranging the disorder of her hair.

"Nacha, what does this mean? Do you want to ruin the reputation of my house?"

"No, Madame. But I've had enough of it."

"You're a fool! You're old enough to have got rid of your silly notions."

Nacha's cheeks turned a flaming red and her eyes shone with anger as she screamed at Madame:

"Don't you dare say a word to me or I'll get the police! What do you mean by taking a child of seventeen into this house? You miserable old woman!"

"So you're going for the police are you? Well, it happens that the police take their orders from me! So don't waste your time telling them tales about this house. I never ruined any woman! You and your like ruin yourselves, because you want to, because you take to vice like ducks to water, because you are. . . ."

But it was little use for "Madame" to wear herself out screaming and running after Nacha; for Nacha, with her hands over her ears, refused to hear, which enraged "Madame" all the more. The

girl was running through the rooms, slamming doors, and shrieking out words certain to be offensive to "Madame's" professional dignity. In this fashion, Nacha in the lead, and "Madame" after her, they reached the stairway, down which Nacha passed light as a breeze. As she opened the sumptuous glass entrance door, and saw "Madame" at the top of the stairs, she stuck out her tongue at her qualifying the dignified lady's trade with certain terms which even her long experience had not prepared her to hear with equanimity.

"You old criminal!"

"Get out of here, viper!"

The door slammed, and Nacha jumped into a cab and drove home. Scarcely had she reached her room when she took off her hat and threw herself down on her bed, weeping convulsively. Her whole body was shaking with a nervous chill. She tried to muffle the sounds of her weeping, but could not. A girl who occupied the room next to hers, came in, greatly alarmed. Should she send for the doctor?—

"Just leave me alone, I want to be alone. . . ."

"Are you angry with me?" asked the girl gently. She was a plump little person with black eyes and dark, soft skin, and was called Julieta.

Nacha, suddenly yielding to the girl's gentleness, sat up and kissed her; but she could not check her sobs and asked again to be left alone.

"And what about the doctor?" asked Julieta. "You had better have him. You are not well."

"All right. Get him! . . ."

Nacha turned toward the wall, still weeping.

In the evening the doctor arrived. Nacha who had not eaten anything was still lying on her bed, and still in her street clothes. The doctor declared the attack to be entirely a matter of nerves and prescribed rest and quiet.

The succession of shocks she had just lived through; Mademoiselle's treachery; the loss of a cherished illusion; the suppression in her of any hope of leading a new life; worst of all, the effect of her decision to return to her former mode of living, had all been so many blows at her strength, physical and moral.

In her sufferings and vacillations, nothing had caused her so much torment as the thought of Monsalvat. Even worse than the certainty that her life was now definitely ruined, was the despair which took possession of her whenever she thought of this man.—She no longer doubted she loved him! His image, always present to her eyes, had assumed gigantic proportions in those moments when she was committing acts that were fatal to all her hopes. As she entered that house of evil it seemed to her that Monsalvat's spirit was waiting there on the stairs, trying to prevent her from passing. She had closed her eyes, and lowered her head, and she had walked straight through the shadowy figure that was trying to save her. . . . But, all the time she was there, he haunted her. The slightest noise made her think he was coming into the room. A voice in the corridor made her start for fear it was his voice. Once she had even thought she saw him pass by the open door. . . .

Where was he now? she wondered. Why did

he not look for her? Couldn't he guess how much she needed his protection? Without it she could not help but fall from depth to depth of degradation. Why had not Monsalvat appeared in that house of vice as she so desperately hoped, to rescue her? Why didn't he come now to free her from all this suffering?

Then she remembered that Monsalvat had told her, on the one occasion when they had talked together, that she ought to suffer—only so could she deserve pardon and pity. Those were his words. . . . She brooded over them. Nothing else gave any meaning to her miserable existence. She would welcome suffering then, and resign herself to grief! A little quieted, she went to sleep.

CHAPTER XII

SEPTEMBER! Springtime! Buenos Aires with all the handsome trees of its avenues, its parks and open squares, and of its wide promenades along the river bank, was turning green as if by magic, offering to the delighted eye every conceivable shade of verdure. It was as though the hand of a great and invisible artist were retouching the somewhat faded picture Winter had turned over to him. He crushed under his swift brush the emerald of English lawns, spattered canary yellow on the shoots of young shrubs, with an impatient stroke of the knife scraped from the leaf fronds their velvety coverings of dull blue, burnt sienna and fawn, in order to freshen them up with aurora yellow, sepia, cobalt; poured out on the great parks all the chromes of his cosmic palate; rejuvenated the willows with ingenious splashes of those gamboge shades which remind one of fantastic tropical climes; and turned high noon into a glittering dream of gold. Oh, Springtime in Buenos Aires! Season of awakening grace and enchanting harmony, with nothing of the torpor of hot climates, the over-vivid colorings of the tropics, nor of the sluggishness of those lands where nature puts human energy to sleep through a long winter! Springtime in Buenos Aires! The air quivers with a dust of gold, which seems to float

down from the brilliant sky, emanate from the trees, the flowers, and the grass, enveloping the buildings and transfiguring the human beings who pass through it. Springtime in Buenos Aires!

But for Monsalvat the spring was a season of sadness. To him the light and color and sounds of the reinvigorated city were meaningless. He noticed neither the satisfaction of the plants and grasses in the stir of life within them, nor the delight shining in the faces about him. He was alone in the Universe, a stranger to the world he lived in, for that world was now his enemy; a stranger also, through birth and station, to the world of those who are down-trodden, and oppressed. His mother dead, his sister lost, and that other woman in whom his new life had taken form, as yet unfound, he was alone. The friends of former times laughed at his ideas and ideals, said he had a new "pose," thought him crazy. What could he discuss with them except the trivial events of the social farce? They neither understood him nor wished to understand. He was utterly and irrevocably alone. If some one chanced to mention the beauty of the day, he answered—but to himself—"What is that to me?" What is there beyond our own sensations? Does even the material world exist save as our senses make us aware of it? And his sensations told him that there was nothing but sadness, grief, loneliness and gloom in all the human beings around him. The world was his own unhappy creation, the work of his agonized spirit. No, that Springtide was for him a time of bitterness.

All the while Nacha, with her somewhat ingen-

uous aspirations to a new kind of life was hiding at Mlle. Dupont's, Monsalvat had been searching for her. With Torres, he had sought her at Mme. Annette's toward the beginning of September, about a month before Nacha had gone there. He had been also to the house of Juanita Sanmartino, and the more recent disappointment of not finding Nacha there filled him with gloomy foreboding. Where was she? No one knew. Torres was certain she had not returned to her former means of livelihood; for in that case she would have appeared at one of these houses. It was Torres' theory that she was living with someone, perhaps some former friend, perhaps a recent chance acquaintance.

And Eugenia Monsalvat? No one could give him any clue to her whereabouts either. Had she changed her name? Was she dead? Or dragging out a wretched existence in the big city's underworld?

Towards the end of September, an appointment as second chief of staff in a department of the Ministry of Foreign Relations came to distract Monsalvat from his obsession of loneliness and failure. He began now to spend all his afternoons working at the Ministry. Some of his colleagues, who had heard the rumors current about Monsalvat's opinions and eccentricities, tried to make him talk, to force him to commit himself; but he maintained his reserve, and skillfully turned aside the indiscreet insinuations aimed at him.

On a certain morning of this same month, Monsalvat betook himself to his mother's former lodgings, for he thought it time to call upon the Morenos.

Since the morning when he had suspected that Irene was in danger of falling in love with him, he had avoided seeing her. What might such a feeling on her part lead to? Yet, free as he was from other entanglements why should he not accept the affection of this pretty and passionate girl? She was experienced enough to know what she was doing—there would be no deception. . . . In his solitude, with no friend on all the wide horizon of his life, why run away from Irene? . . . But there was Nacha. . . . What though his search had been useless, and he had no news of her, nor any kind of assurance that she ever thought of him? No; he could not, now, permit himself to love another woman. He was bound as by a vow. Was he then in love with Nacha? One whole week he fought out the answer; called himself ridiculous, despised himself, tried to detach his thoughts from everything which might draw him towards her; it was of no avail. On the contrary, the more he thought of her the more he longed to find her. But he had not forgotten Irene. He did not go to see her; but he sent her money in amounts which to her family seemed enormous. Irene wrote to thank him and asked to be allowed to see him in his rooms if he would not come to call on her.

On this September afternoon Monsalvat found the entire Moreno family at home, to his relief; for he did not want to be alone with Irene.

"My Protector," exclaimed Moreno, at sight of him, "my Doctor, Savior of my accursed tribe, Light of Legal Science! Model of Generosity!"

Monsalvat protested at these eulogies and tried

to escape from Moreno's determined embrace. His wife was laughing at her husband, and at the same time, crying, as she kissed Monsalvat's hand and pointed to the children.

"We cannot permit such modesty, Doctor. We are yours, entirely yours. To think that the whole Moreno family, and Moreno himself . . . *Quantum mutatus ab illo!* as Cicero said. You see I do not forget my Latin! Culture, Doctor! I was a man of law once, I lived among books and historic cases — and now I am a pauper, a drunkard, a. . . ."

Irene, standing in a corner of the room, covered her face, ashamed. From the moment Monsalvat had come into the room she had not moved, waiting for the avalanche of thanks she had foreseen, to pass. Monsalvat, as embarrassed as she by Moreno's words, finally made his way through the huddling children and held out his hand to her.

"The flower of my house! exclaimed Moreno, adding in a melancholy tone, "Ah, if we were not so poor, I would give her to no one but a Prince— or—pardon me—to a Dr. Monsalvat, who is like a prince; for he is a Prince of Jurisprudence. . . ."

Neither Monsalvat nor Irene were listening. Monsalvat had started when he felt Irene's burning hand in his, and saw her eyes, darkened with the passion that consumed her. He looked at her a moment and, not knowing what to say, turned to address Moreno's fawning flattery. Monsalvat then took leave, saying he had come especially to learn if Irene had some news for him.

"I am going to tell it to you. Come!" Irene

replied with a strange burst of energy; and she faced him with flashing eyes and quivering lips.

Monsalvat shook hands with her parents and followed to the narrow hallway which led to the stairs. Moreno was coming along too but Irene told him to stay with her mother.

"She gives the orders! Now you see, Doctor, what has become of my paternal authority. I'm just the watch-dog. I hear and obey, for fear of the whip! When your career is over, that's what you get! My dear doctor, I am your servant!" Monsalvat followed Irene down the dark hall for a few yards. They came closer to one another, his clothing touched hers. He was conscious of the girl's burning passion, he felt himself being drawn towards her. In the semi-darkness Irene's brilliant eyes gleamed strangely.

"Well, what news?" asked Monsalvat uneasily.

"News!" Irene with quick violence pulled Monsalvat's face toward hers and placed on his mouth her hot, trembling lips.

He turned faint. His will abandoned him. He heard the wild, mad words Irene was saying. "He must take her away!" She pressed her trembling body close to his. Suddenly Monsalvat came to himself. Nacha's image arose before his eyes. . . . With a strength which came from the depths of his soul he pushed Irene away from him. This poor passionate girl was threatening his ideal. All that he had so far accomplished was in danger of crumbling to dust. The only justification of his life would, with a moment's weakness, be lost. He said

goodby to her, asked her to forgive him and walked quietly toward the stairs.

"Don't leave me this way," she cried. "If I can't work for you, live for you, I shall die, I shall kill myself . . . if you won't take me with you!"

But Monsalvat did not hear. He was already in the street.

Irene, shaken by violent shudders and sobs, with a wild cry, threw herself against the wall.

After this episode he was more eager than ever to find Nacha. He began to make the rounds of cabarets, restaurants, and theatres. But day after day passed, and there was not the slightest news of her. He began to despair when it occurred to him that the streets might furnish him the information he so anxiously sought. He became a vagabond, roaming about hour after hour, morning, afternoon, and night. The avenues in the centre of the city, those where women of pleasure passed, came to know him. He thought he saw Nacha, quickened his step, followed the woman. It was not she. He sought her face in the crowds that all morning wander idly up and down the *Avenida Florida.* He sought it in the throngs loitering on the wide promenade when the lights of the shop windows drive back the shadows of the high buildings. He sought her among the young and pretty women who surreptitiously pass up and down the avenue, in quest of bread, love, pleasure. He sought her at night in the streets leading toward the theatres, the movies, the cabarets. And his shadow passing up and down these places was no different from that of a man timidly seeking a daughter of joy. The thou-

sand noises of the street, the cries of newspaper venders, automobile horns, street car gongs, phonographs playing in the shops, the persistent scraping of shoe leather on the sidewalk, the voices of the toy venders, of the sellers of lottery tickets, of the flower girls, rang out in the strange chaotic symphony of the city. But he was deaf to it all. Lights glittered, electric street-signs flashed; blue, red, green, yellow lamps shone out from windows, sometimes far above the street; but he went by unaware of all this nightly brilliancy. The show windows tempted with jewels, flowers, books; he was blind to them. He went on, heedless of the marvelous spectacle offered by the streets of cosmopolitan exuberant, noisy, energetic, restless Buenos Aires. He was incapable of seeing anything but the face he sought: Nacha's face.

And while he searched for Nacha, he searched the streets for his sister also. But not with the same eagerness. For Eugenia, whom he scarcely knew, he had never had much affection. Besides, there was so little hope of finding her in this fashion! In the ten years that had passed since he had seen her, the transformation of an innocent twenty year old girl into a courtesan must have been thoroughly accomplished. How could he recognize her even if he met her? He wanted to come upon her and help her, yes;—but from sense of duty; and because of his mother's last wish.

October now. A month and a half had passed in useless searching. Discouraged, he thought of giving up all hope, and returning to his former way of life, since he had failed in his first duty, that of

finding Nacha. He tried to discover arguments to justify his abandoning what he called his "duty." What was Nacha after all? Well then—was he going to fall in love with that kind of a woman, and make her represent an ideal, a duty, a reason for living? Had he brought ruin upon her? Why did he want to see her?

He began to think that he would never find her, that she was irrecoverably lost. And it was his fault! It was he who had gone to see her, tried to influence her, caused trouble between her and her lover. It was only just that he should help her to regain her moral independence, the right she shared with every human being to hope and to love. He could not let her continue in slavery, any more than he could allow any other human beings whom he, personally, knew, to remain enslaved! But he hoped also, in saving her, to save himself. It was not exploitation by others that threatened him, but his own coldness of fear, and the uselessness of his empty life. He wanted to free himself from the clutch of vanity, from the all-enveloping net of human selfishness. He must accomplish something good and great! To redeem the slaves of degrading labor, of destructive passion, of vice and greed, there was a man's task. Well, the opportunity for that might come. . . .

But meanwhile there was a girl who was unhappy, who needed his help. Would it be such a small thing to save her? He could imagine himself quite content were that accomplished. Suddenly hope sprang up in the midst of his discouragement. If his tenants refused to allow the improvements

he had wanted to make in the tenement, he would use the forty thousand *pesos* of his mortgage in carrying on a thorough search of the city. Surely Nacha would be found! Before long, however, he had to part with a considerable sum to pay off his mother's debts; and to buy from Celedonia some letters of Eugenia's which the mulatto intimated she could profitably sell to the newspapers. Monsalvat had an uneasy feeling that this procedure of hers had been suggested by that enthusiastic admirer of his, Moreno.

One October afternoon Torres, whom he met on the street, exclaimed, "I have some news. Nacha has gone back to the profession. A few days ago she was at Madame Annette's." This was a blow as well as a relief. But his friend's words seemed to summon Nacha from the air. All that afternoon, all night, all the next day, and the days following, Nacha was with him, and in the midst of intense suffering he felt a new, strange joy. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

DURING the ten days when Nacha lay ill in bed her story reached the ears of everyone in the boarding house and aroused general interest. The girls of this calling, who are not yet hardened by cynicism and despair, are for the most part sentimental, even romantic, and invariably sympathize with the hero or the heroine, as the case may be, of a moving love story. Nacha was reported to be suffering from a passion for a man who had spoken to her only once; it was asserted also that she knew neither who he was, nor where he came from; but the fact that she must needs be unfaithful to this platonic and strange love, could not fail to arouse the liveliest sympathy among all these girls. They pitied her from their hearts, and considered it quite natural that she should be ill under the circumstances. When a girl loved a man as much as this, it was a shame that she should have to live as Nacha was living! What did this man look like, they wondered, and what could he and Nacha have talked about in that one fatal conversation? Then from trying to imagine what this love story must have been, they began to recall others in which they had played a part. But none of them was like Nacha's which, they agreed, surpassed even the "daily love stories" of the newspapers. And they envied Nacha, and hoped for an experience like hers,

even though, like her, they might have to suffer hunger and sickness.

The owner of the house, Doña Lucia, was a silent little old woman. She kept two rooms, spotlessly clean, and entirely unattractive, for her own use. She never ate with her boarders and was too timid to call on them in their rooms or make any advances to them. Of a good provincial family, she concealed her name, for she thought it discreditable to have such lodgers in her house. Her family was little known in Buenos Aires, and as a matter of fact, she had little affection for any of its members; nevertheless she had a superstitious respect for "good blood" and would have suffered anything rather than disgrace an old name. Poor and alone, forgotten by her relatives, this widow of an officer who had died insane, had taken up her quarters in a boarding house kept by a friend. Even then lodgers of doubtful respectability were frequenting it. Doña Lucia was aware of this fact but never dared mention it to her friend, and when the latter died, she kept the house going. She had resolved to take in no one without references, but she was too timid to insist on this point. Moreover she always found it hard not to believe what she was told. After awhile she grew accustomed to the class of boarders who sought her house; and the girls had a genuine respect for this old lady who went to church so often, and looked so severe.

When Nacha was well enough to get up, she went to call on Doña Lucia, to thank her for kind attentions such as goblets of port wine, and the paying of her medicines at the drug store during her illness.

Doña Lucia revealed that all this had been done at the expense of three of the lodgers, Julieta, Sara and Ana Maria. These girls barely knew her and Nacha was touched by their generosity. She was well aware that Sara earned little having recently had difficulties with the police; Julieta was a quiet little person who made barely enough to live on, and Ana Maria's own bad health required a considerable expenditure for medicines. Their care of Nacha must have been at the cost of their own necessities.

Nacha could not but admit that she would have done as much for Julieta and Sara, who were already her friends; but it surprised her very much that Ana Maria should have shared in this expense. Ana Maria had visited her only twice during her illness. The first time she had come in with Julieta, and Nacha had been disagreeably affected by her presence. She was painfully emaciated, her cheeks sunken and yellow and her wide eyes looked frightened. Nacha decided she must be consumptive. She noted that her features were fine, of an aristocratic caste. During that first visit Nacha could not keep from staring at Ana Maria's wasted form, her prominent shoulder blades, her sunken chest, the transparent skin of her hands. The girl spoke slowly and there was in her voice a haunting melancholy. No one knew much about her. She claimed that her name was Ana Maria Gonzalez, but offered nothing to prove it. She seemed destitute of plans, of desire to live, of interests. Julieta had heard, from a friend, that Ana Maria had once possessed every luxury. A success in the "profession," she

had owned a fine house, plenty of money, her own automobile; but quite recently, and very suddenly had come the decay of fortune and health. There was something mysterious about her which excited Nacha's curiosity. The second time she saw her, Nacha was alone in her room. Ana Maria, staring at her with her wide strange eyes, questioned her about her life. Nacha's answer, appeared to interest her but little; indeed, she seemed at times not to be listening. When Nacha began to talk about Monsalvat, however, Ana Maria suddenly became all attention. She seemed to be absorbing this part of the story with all her senses, with all her soul; yet, when Nacha had ended, she left the room without a word.

Since that afternoon Nacha had not seen her, but she spoke of her to Julieta and Sara. Julieta, plump and gentle, with velvety eyes and red lips, still retained a great deal of girlish modesty. She cherished the dream that a grand passion would come to her rescue. At times she became melancholy, even pessimistic, but she did not yet count herself among the lost. One result of this was that the other girls considered her "respectable." Among these others was Sara, who had all the appearance of having fallen very low indeed, yet she had led this life scarcely a year. Vice had, however, set its mark on her. She liked coarse stories, and obscene words. When, in the dining-room, some one of the men living in the house told a questionable anecdote, Sara never failed to respond with something worse. She was tall, thin, quick of movement with long arms and legs. Her face was sufficiently

pretty, but it was her mouth people noticed; a mouth that was large, the lips mobile, and curving slightly upward, red as pomegranates, and moist. When talking, she moved her head constantly, gesticulating with her long arms. She rarely sat still, preferring to walk up and down, and she could not say a sentence without covering a distance of two or three yards, lifting her feet as though about to execute a dance step, laughing and opening her mouth wide so that one could see her long uneven teeth. There was not the slightest reserve nor modesty about her and she sought her patrons in the street with an indifference to appearances which distressed Julieta. Sara seemed oddly unaware of her situation, and of the difference between her and decent women. As to men, they were all the same to her. She liked them all, and never attempted to claim any one of them. Doña Lucia could not bear her and would have put her out had she dared, for Sara and her friends, when they were in a merry mood, would sing, talk loud, and burst into roars of laughter, all to the great distress of Doña Lucia, who implored the saints to free her from this disgraceful boarder. Sara's one fear was the police. She had only lately been arrested on the street and since then had become very cautious. Ana Maria gave every evidence of thoroughly disliking her; and several times when Sara indulged in coarse speeches, she had left the table. This always seemed a good joke to Sara, who, between bursts of laughter, would call Ana Maria "Madame Pompadour," though no one knew where she found this name, nor why she applied it to Ana Maria.

"Ana Maria must be half crazy," Nacha was saying. "I am afraid of her."

"You needn't be," Julieta replied. "She suffers a good deal. Nobody knows what she's been through before coming to this. I'm sorry for her. The poor girl has a kind heart."

"Yes, of course!" exclaimed Sara, with a laugh, walking up and down in the room. "You always think they have 'kind hearts.' I think she's got a lot of silly pride. She thinks herself better than the rest of us."

"Well, isn't she?" asked Julieta.

Nacha, now almost well, dreaded the moment of complete recovery. That moment would exact her return to what she hated. She would have given years from her life to be able to live as a decent girl. Moreover she was afraid of having another attack of illness if she could not have the decency she craved. But it was neither for fear of illness, nor love of decency that she wanted to keep "straight." It was for Monsalvat, who was in her thoughts night and day, whether she slept or lay awake, when she talked with her companions, and when she read, alone in her room.

One afternoon when Julieta came in Nacha said to her, "I want to be good—on his account, you see, Julieta. I'd do anything, work in a store, or whatever comes along. Do you think there's any chance —of my being what I ought to be?"

Julieta, who had been listening with a woeful expression in her dark eyes, smiled gently, and caressed Nacha's hand, but she did not look at her friend.

"Why don't you answer me? Do you think it impossible that I—that any woman—for love, and thinking all the time of him. . . ? Is is impossible? Tell me the truth. If you don't tell me what you really think you're not my friend. Is is possible? Answer me!"

"It would be if it depended only on us. But people make it so hard for us! They don't want us to be good, Nacha!"

Both girls knew how true that was, and remained silent a long time, saddened, hurt, looking at one another like little children who have lost their mother.

Nevertheless Nacha determined to make one more attempt to save herself. She would find Monsalvat. She would seek him to the ends of the earth! So she began questioning the two students who lived in the house, a pair of lazy rascals, who took small interest in anything beyond their immediate horizon. One of them, Grajera, a short dark youth, as ugly as he was talkative, a chronic law-student, dissipated, incapable of telling the truth, had tried every makeshift for raising money. He had taught the art of skating, delivered lectures on tuberculosis, acted in cheap theatres, written articles for small town newspapers, and invented a system for never paying hotel or boarding-house bills. Nacha had known him years ago in her mother's boarding house, and, because Grajera had made Riga's acquaintance there, was on friendly terms with him. He was besides an amusing table companion. Nacha implored him to find out where Monsalvat lived, and Grajera willingly promised to

do so. The only trouble was that he always forgot to attend to this commission.

The other youth, also nominally a student, although it would have been hard to discover of what, was of a Cordovan family, the son of a well-known judge, whose death after a laborious and austere life, had been generally lamented. Panchito, who had been sent away from home on account of early misbehavior, returned to Cordova after his father's death, but was now once more in Buenos Aires, incorrigible as ever, always on the lookout for a chance to play a trick to his advantage, always running after women and always lying to everybody. Nacha asked him also to try to discover Monsalvat's whereabouts; but Panchito never thought about anything except the next races, handicaps, betting favorites and other topics of the turf. He always jotted down in a note book the wind velocity, the weight of each horse, the condition of the track, and other highly significant details. Yet, notwithstanding all this care, and the scientific accuracy of the data on which Panchito based his calculations, he invariably lost.

When she saw that her friends were not going to help her much, Nacha had recourse to a woman who told fortunes from cards. She had been recommended by Sara, who asserted that she never failed to foretell exactly what was going to happen. Nacha sent for her, and watched breathlessly, in tense excitement, while the dirty, yellow-skinned old sybil prepared to read her fate from a greasy pack of cards, which had been shuffled by Nacha, and cut with her left hand.

"The ace of diamonds and the four of clubs mean recovery from sickness. But here's the four of hearts; that means successful love; completely successful; because here's the two of hearts, do you see, which means a proposal! Then—here's a dark woman, and serious illness!"

"Yes. It's a woman. But there's nothing here that means love. It's certainly a woman, Miss."

Nacha tried to find an interpretation that would fit all of this. Could Monsalvat be ill? or in love with another woman? Such an idea was unbearable. Then she asked the question that was uppermost in her mind. "Where did Monsalvat live?"

"Here's the king of hearts! That means a dark man, of strong character, and generous."

"That's it, of course! Well, where is he?"

"This doesn't say. But here's the two of spades. That means a letter, or news, or an arrival. Either the dark man is going to write to you; or he is coming here at any moment."

Nacha gladly paid the old woman the five *pesos* she charged for her services. This left her penniless, but she was happy! Everything looked hopeful now. Several times during the day she thought Monsalvat was about to arrive on the scene. The following day, she felt so certain that someone was coming that she waited in the courtyard; and she was immensely surprised when some newcomers turned out to be a man and wife with their twelve year old daughter, relatives of Panchito's, and just landed from Cordova. No sooner were they installed in their rooms than there was a general rush to Panchito's quarters for an explanation. Pan-

chito, still half asleep, was forced to receive his callers in bed. Grajera, in the bedroom opposite, was snoring and Sara tried to rouse him with ticklings, slaps, and cold water, until there was a general protest. Meanwhile Panchito tried desperately to piece together an explanation of his relatives' arrival at his boarding house.

"Just like that donkey to come here," he was saying. "I told him what kind of a house this was, and what made him bring his family here, I don't know! Oh, I've got it! I didn't see through it before! This is some of my old woman's work, that's what it is! Of course! I wrote her that I was living in a very respectable house, with a highly religious family, and that they made me go to confession twice a month—and the old woman must have repeated all this to that bumpkin uncle of mine who lives out in the country, in Saint Joseph's Sleepy Hollow—and he took it into his head to come here. . . ."

"Where did you say he lived?" inquired Sara, her mouth open from ear to ear.

"Saint Joseph's Sleepy Hollow—a little village over toward. . . ."

But the name called forth a series of witticisms at which Sara was nearly beside herself with mirth. Panchito implored the girls to behave properly. He didn't want his relatives to become aware of their mistake if it could be prevented. Then he drove all his visitors out, and went back to bed.

That afternoon Grajera and Panchito presented themselves, in throes of laughter, at Nacha's door. They had just beheld Sara reclining on a couch, her

long legs waving in the air, while she lent an obliging ear to a detailed account of all the troubles, sicknesses and operations of the lady from Cordova, who had evidently taken a great fancy to this sympathetic listener.

Doña Lucia was delighted with her new boarders, though somewhat astonished when they informed her that they had selected her house because it had been recommended to them for its atmosphere. Doña Lucia could only nod and curtsey, and turn every color of the rainbow. She perceived, however, that her guests from Cordova would require her to set a good table; and, against her will, she found herself forced to ask Nacha for her board.

This was what Nacha had been dreading. She could not blame Doña Lucia, who was well within her right. All night long she tried to devise some means of escaping the inevitable. Should she try a hand at a gambling table, buy a lottery ticket, ask someone to lend her money. . . ? But at two o'clock the next day she put on her street clothes and started off for the house of Signora Sanmartino, avoiding Julieta's clear eyes as she did so; for she was ashamed, not so much because of the act itself as because of what it signified, the betrayal of a feeling which had ennobled her and purified her in the eyes of her companions.

Nacha knew Juanita Sanmartino of old. Although Juanita was an Italian she might have been Queen Victoria's own sister. The same complexion, the same downward curving nose, the same odd and rather ridiculous way of wearing her hair. Like Mme. Annette, she had a daughter, and for her

daughter's sake traded in the misfortunes of other women. Her daughter, a pretty girl of fourteen, lived in the house; and her pristine innocence seemed quite untouched by her surroundings.

Nacha returned crushed. She paid for a few days' board; then went to her room, and threw herself on her bed, weeping.

Suddenly she felt a presence in the room and sat up. More skeleton-like than ever, Ana Maria stood looking at her. Nacha gave a little scream. The girl tried to take her hand, but Nacha drew away, shuddering, from the touch of her skin.

"Why . . . are you afraid . . . of me?"

Ana Maria's words struck her ear like a voice from beyond the grave. It was growing dark; but Nacha had not the courage to get up and turn on the light, nor did she know what to reply. So she waited, hoping Julieta would come in.

"Tell me again about Monsalvat," commanded Ana Maria feverishly.

"I think he must have loved me very much, don't you? Who else would have done what he did for me? And yet sometimes I think it was not for me at all, but for his sister who was betrayed, and who is lost, as I am lost. I think he did for me what he wanted to do for her."

Ana Maria's expression was very strange, her eyes wild as though she saw something as ghastly as death. Nacha, terrified, was about to cry out; but Ana Maria sat silent, her wasted body scarcely able any longer to hold the unhappy spirit that was trying desperately to tear itself out of it. Finally she stood up and went out of the room, but with

an unsteady step, leaning on the articles of furniture she passed. When Julieta and Sara came in, Nacha told them about Ana Maria's unaccountable behavior.

"Perhaps she knew Monsalvat. Perhaps he was a lover of hers," suggested Sara.

"Oh," cried Nacha, with a start. "I see what it is. I see! His sister!"

Julieta rushed to the girl's room to discover if this were true. She found Ana Maria lying on her bed, motionless, apparently asleep. While Julieta stood looking at her, she opened her eyes once or twice but apparently saw nothing. Julieta spoke to her, but received no reply. She knew this was all very strange, but stood hesitating, not knowing what to do, until Ana Maria grew restless and began to murmur unintelligibly. Then Julieta called Sara and Nacha. It occurred to them to give the sick girl some brandy; but she grew worse, and began to moan. Then she became delirious. They sent for the doctor. The whole house was curious, now, to see what was going on. Some of the boarders crowded into the room, others stood around the door asking questions. Doña Lucia, full of scruples, did not venture to come in.

When the doctor arrived, Ana Maria was dying. He was not long in discovering what had happened, for a morphine syringe lay on the floor, and on the table by the bed there was a bottle of the drug.

Julieta and Nacha searched through the dead girl's belongings for a clue to her name; and they soon came upon some old letters tied up in blue ribbon. Almost everyone began "Dear Eugenia"

and ended "Your brother" or "Fernando." Among them were three photographs, one of an elderly man, one of a woman, and one of Fernando Monsalvat. Nacha took possession of this last. There could no longer be any doubt. The unfortunate morphine addict was Eugenia Monsalvat. . . .

Nacha had never seen death at close hand before. Obsessed by the scene she had just witnessed, she imagined herself dying, forsaken by everyone she knew. The horrible pictures Monsalvat had painted of what lay in store for her rose threateningly in her memory; and she was so terrified by her imaginings that she could not bear to be alone for a single moment, nor could she bring herself to go to bed. Once when she tried to sleep fully dressed, she awoke suddenly, uttering a shriek which startled the entire household. In her dream she had been locked in a coffin. . . .

Panchito's aunt, and Doña Lucia set the room in order, and performed the last services for poor Ana Maria. Sara, whose custom it was to go out to the streets every night after dinner, remained in the room, silent, and full of grotesque fears. As the women sat watching the dead girl one of them began to pray, and the girls joined in, shaken and weeping. The rough pine coffin, the two yellow tapers, the tearful prayers for the unhappy creature who had died in poverty, and far from any of her kin, the grief of these other girls, who wept as if repentent of all the tawdry weakness of their lives, formed a scene impressive even to the three or four men looking on. It seemed as though Ana Maria's long days of suffering, and short hours of joy, her

caresses and her laughter, the goblets of champagne that those dead hands had raised to then living lips, and the soft silks that had once touched that cold body, were transformed into tears now, blinding the eyes of these girls, who wept for her past, for her death, for her suffering, but above all, for her despair.

At a certain moment, when the women began to pray, the two students, empty-headed and irreligious as they were, had the same impulse. They too wished to offer something to the dead; and at precisely the same moment, hastily, and each trying to hide the gesture from the other, they crossed themselves. At any other time this would have been the occasion of ridicule; but now each turned away with a smile that had in it more of pity than anything else; for even they felt that there was in that room something more than a tragic death; to cross oneself in the presence of these even more tragic lives seemed indeed a small thing.

CHAPTER XIV

THE doctor's words rang in Monsalvat's ear. "Nacha has returned to the profession." How ironical the phrase! Profession, in truth, but of despair instead of faith in God, in law, in science! Yet oddly enough, this very relapse of hers gave him hope. He knew now where to look for her; and at the thought his blood ran faster. The very signs on the street corners spoke of finding her; automobile horns, the cries of street venders, all the incongruous voices of the enormous city, clamored to him that soon he would find Nacha. When his thoughts dwelt on all that was horrible, inhuman and painful in the life the girl must at that very moment be leading, his heart seemed to grow cold. No, it was better not to think. . . . Yet, were it not for these facts too horrible to think of, he might never trace her!

So, with his friend the doctor, he began the search for Nacha, and also for his sister, although his recovery of Eugenia was now a secondary interest. Together they started on a painful and long journey through the circles of that living hell reserved for fallen women, a martyrdom among other more frightful martyrdoms. Yet these stages of his journey led him through only the first circles of that inferno; for it was in these first circles that he ex-

pected to find the two women he was seeking. There are other circles more frightful and more tragic still.

With the doctor as his guide Monsalvat descended into these regions. The entrance gate was Madame Annette's front door; and upon it might very well have been blazoned forth

> "Through me you pass into the city of woe,
> Through me you pass into eternal pain,
> Through me among the people lost for aye!"

But, alas, these were not the only gates of hell! Their number was infinite, and the women who passed through returned no more. However, the door of Mme. Annette's house was the principal gate, the gate of gold!

"Nacha Regules?" the French woman repeated coldly. "I don't know her."

The doctor persisted however in his inquiries, for he had caught a false intonation in the woman's denial. Mme. Annette kept to her first statement; and as he watched her vulgar gestures and listened to her displeasing voice, Monsalvat felt an indefinable uneasiness. How could such a woman, disagreeable, coarse, bad-tempered as she appeared, have the patrons of the sort Torres asserted she had? Surely crime lurked under the apparent luxury of this place; and if this evil enchantress succeeded in satisfying her aristocratic clients, it was with morsels of delicate flesh obtained by the most unspeakable deceptions and cruelties!

"Shall I call in the girls?" Mme. Annette asked abruptly, mistrustful of her callers; for she scarcely

knew Torres and she had noticed Monsalvat's disgust.

"Let us go to the dining room. Ask them to have a glass of champagne with us," the doctor replied.

Three of the girls came in. One of them was the child with whom Nacha had made friends. Monsalvat started at sight of this young thing. His eyes flashed anger as he looked at Mme. Annette, who lowered hers, more frightened than ashamed. Torres called the child to him and she sat down on the sofa beside him. Mme. Annette left her callers for a moment while she went to prepare the champagne. A fine-looking brunette, who declared herself a Paraguayan, entered into conversation with Monsalvat. Her eyes, indeed all her features, and her manner of speaking, bore witness to not very remote Indian ancestors. She knew nothing of Nacha or Eugenia, had never heard of them. Monsalvat, who thought every woman in this profession must be the victim of hostile circumstances, asked her to tell him her story. No doubt she too had suffered at the hands of father, or lover, or some exploiter of women! The girl, however, protested that the life she was leading was the only life for her. It meant pleasure, freedom, money; she did not have to work and heard nothing but pretty speeches from men. As she spoke a savage sensuality played about her eyes and lips. Obviously she loved pleasure for pleasure's sake. While she praised her profession she blew kisses into the air or pressed her arms tightly against her breasts in a kind of ecstasy; and she

drank her champagne slowly, tasting its sweetness to the full, licking her lips, and looking mischievously at Monsalvat out of the corner of her eye. He was thinking meanwhile that though she was far from looking upon herself as a victim, she was one nevertheless. Who could tell what fatal inheritance was hers? The descendant perhaps of alcoholics who had sought in liquor some alleviation for the misery of their material circumstances, or for that other misery caused by the hatred and prejudices of their neighbors! A link by itself meant nothing. One had to consider the whole chain; evil could be born only of evil.

Meanwhile Torres was obtaining information. The child beside him knew nothing of Eugenia but she recalled very distinctly a girl who had come there one afternoon. "She felt so sorry for me," the child went on, "and her name was Nacha. She went away, because she had a quarrel with Madame —I don't know what about—"

Madame meanwhile had admitted to Torres, when he told her that they wanted to find Nacha for some reason connected with "justice," that she had been there.

"You put her in jail, do! That's where she belongs! You ought to hear the language she uses! I'm a respectable woman: I don't owe a cent to anybody, and I'm a good mother! There aren't many who pay more for their daughter's education! Some of the best people in Buenos Aires are my friends and that impudent little hussy allows herself to talk back to me!"

As the two men were leaving they met an acquain-

tance of the doctor's at the curb. Just as she was getting out of a taxi Torres inquired of the seductive Amelia if she could give him any news of Nacha.

"Go to Juanita's. Someone told me only yesterday that she went there. I must say I don't understand Nacha. Juanita's of all places! Such a crazy thing to do! One must keep up one's position, don't you think? There's no need of stepping down in the world before one has to. She just lowers herself going to Juanita's. . . . How am I looking, darling Doctor? Am I getting old, do you think? Well, so long! Good-bye, old man!"

It was still only about six o'clock; and they decided to go to the Sanmartino house then and there. Juanita received them in a large parlor, stuffy with hangings and filled with pretentious furniture. With her usual stately dignity and Victoria-like appearance, Mme. Sanmartino met her two callers very graciously. Monsalvat who was standing in the middle of the room saw a little girl of thirteen or so pass through the hall. He felt that behind the portières of the doorway women were watching; and it seemed to him that everywhere in that house, in the air, in the furnishings, were traces of Nacha; yet he divined also that he would not find her there.

"Yes, she used to come here," Juanita was saying in an ingratiating tone, slowly moving her head up and down. "A very nice girl, too. Quite pretty! But she doesn't come any more. No doubt she has found somebody to take care of her. . . ."

She stopped, and looked at both men fearing her words might have wounded one of them. Monsalvat had not been able to control a start.

"Well, anyway, she doesn't come here any more, but I don't know why. Sometimes our patrons take girls away from the house—and set them up. But I don't think that in this case. . . ."

Monsalvat turned pale. He had lost her again! But Torres inquired the name of the patron who had made friends with Nacha, and Juanita gave it to him at once. Then, in the silence that followed, the doctor looked at his friend and nodded. Monsalvat understood. Now was the time to ask about Eugenia; but he had not the courage. Torres came to his rescue, but obtained no satisfaction. Perhaps the girl had changed her name! Monsalvat described her. But what good was his description? There were several girls in that very house who answered it.

"Did you see that child in the hall?" Monsalvat asked nervously when he and Torres reached the street.

"That's Juanita's daughter. It's strange, isn't it? Juanita is sacrificing herself for that child. She hopes to work up a business that's good enough to sell, and then retire on a small fortune. It's for her daughter's sake that she exploits other women!"

Monsalvat demurred. "Why did she keep her daughter in such surroundings?"

"Why, those girls wouldn't say a word in that child's presence that she oughtn't to hear! Of course, now and then, they may let something slip without thinking. But, after all, that child couldn't help but consider that the relations between men and women are nothing but a simple business arrangement. She will see that the girls she knows

sell themselves, and she too will sell herself, to some good fellow with a fortune; but her price will be not twenty or thirty thousand dollars but a hundred thousand. She'll make a good match."

Monsalvat was losing hope. That inferno was too vast, the catacombs of this subterranean world too obscure and intricate! Torres, as if to cheer him, drew a paper from his pocket. It was a sinister, a terrifying list of two hundred houses of the kind they had just visited, some of them aristocratic, some of them middle class, most of them modest or shabby; and somewhere in these houses were the women they sought! Monsalvat kept the list, but decided to continue his search alone. He could not take up more of the doctor's time.

Torres insisted, however, on taking him to a house where there was a good chance of obtaining information. They sent in their names and a servant ushered them into a room which had none of the perfumed, wholesale, elegance of Mme. Annette's house, nor the heavy, mediocre luxuriousness over which Juanita queened it. Here everything was extremely simple without being actually shabby. The owner of the establishment was not long in appearing.

"Florinda," said the doctor, "this is my friend Monsalvat—and this is my friend Florinda, the most charming of creoles. . . ."

"At your service, gentlemen. I am entirely at your orders, but don't believe what this flatterer says. He's an old friend—from good old times, long past. But sit down sir! So honored by your call. . . ."

Florinda, a creole, in the forties, tall and thin and decidedly plain, was married, and had a battalion of children whom she kept at the back of the house. The youngest was six months old. Her husband was obligingly unaware of his wife's occupation; and he was too prudent, "too good-natured," Florinda put in, to inquire as to the source of the money which supported him. He always left the house early in the morning and returned late at night. He loved and admired his faithful consort, model of wives and housekeepers, and always proclaimed her a "thorough lady." His own claims to distinction, a slow and pompous manner of speaking, exaggerated manners, constant praise of his wife's good qualities and his amazing physical beauty, attached her with unbreakable bonds to this ideal husband.

"Oh, you want to know something about Nacha, sir?" Florinda murmured, in her thin and somewhat sleepy voice. "Yes, I know her. Distinguished, isn't she? Always very correct, and very kind! I know her. I have the pleasure of her acquaintance, and I have always been very fond of her, for I know how to value people, and I always recognize good breeding. I can't bear people who are ill-bred. And I always say that breeding is something that can't be taught. You get it in your cradle. Good blood is the best certificate. . . ."

The conversation went on at length. Torres always found this woman amusing. Now and then he produced a word or phrase of double meaning, whereupon Florinda would lower her eyes, and smile, looking like a plump, good-natured cat.

However, she did not know Nacha's lodging place, and had never heard of Eugenia. The two friends left, Florinda taking leave of them with a whole series of bows, pretty speeches, and every manner of courtesy.

"Now there's a woman who really thinks she's respectable and she sold her own daughter. Queer, isn't it?"

"We are all responsible for things such as that," Monsalvat exclaimed, as if thinking aloud. "In that sale, the man who bought the girl was guilty, and the parents and friends of the man to whom she was sold had their share of guilt; and the teachers who taught that man; and the authors of the books he read. For who of all these prevented that sale? And what law have the law-makers devised to abolish these evils? And weren't all those who looked on, and did nothing to prevent, accomplices?"

Torres did not accept this collective guilt. From his point of view the man responsible for a crime was the man who committed it or the man who helped directly. Society? Bah! What was society but an abstraction? Only the individual exists, and society is made up of individuals. Monsalvat took leave of the doctor because he did not want to discuss theories with him; he was in no mood for discussion. He affirmed, and roundly, dogmatically, sometimes with the ideas and often in the very language of the prophets. . . .

Monsalvat, his list in his pocket, continued his journey next day through the regions of the accursed. Two days later, as his eye fell quite by

chance on the police news in the morning paper, he learned of his sister's death. The item gave the drug addict's name, mentioned her career as a courtezan; and after thus delivering over to public ignominy a respected name, went on to moralizings of the kind always available in the make-up rooms of certain newspapers.

Eugenia's death, and under such conditions, was a heavy blow. Monsalvat suddenly grew ten years older. Now he was indeed alone. His attempts to find Nacha became frantic; failure exasperated him. No sooner was he out of his office in the afternoon than he jumped into a taxi and started off on his search; so all October passed.

But these regions of the lower world cannot be traversed with impunity by the first comer. Monsalvat did not know the ways of these circles; and he experienced annoyances, insults, all manner of humiliation. In some houses they demanded money. In one he was robbed. On more than one occasion he failed to gain admission and was bespattered with gross words from within the fast-locked doors; and all the while he suffered for these unhappy inmates as well as for himself, and came out from his exploration of the dark wood of evil, his heart bleeding, his soul aching, and his brain confused and exhausted.

Everything was useless! Nowhere was there trace of Nacha. Time and hope were passing, and Monsalvat began to have periods of doubt. Perhaps he would not find Nacha; perhaps he had not found himself! In moments of weakness he regretted the comparative happiness of his former

life. He began to believe himself defeated, and fell into profound discouragement.

He tried to forget; he planned several articles; he thought again of his proposed remodelling of the tenement building, held in check by the obstinacy of his tenants. Poor creatures! Exploited for centuries, their grand-parents, their parents, they themselves, knew nothing else; how could they then sense his good intentions? Their whole experience prevented it. They could not help believing that his plans concealed a new form of exploitation; and they considered his request for them to move as an infringement on their rights. They were now protesting angrily against the regulations of the new superintendent who was trying to make his tenants observe a few elementary practices of public hygiene. Monsalvat was anxious to have the work begun; for the sum lent him by the bank was in danger of disappearing what with his constant charities to people who really needed aid, and to those who imposed upon his good faith and sympathy.

One afternoon in November he went to the tenement house. In its over-shadowed courtyard hungry, ragged children were running about; a few women waiting for a husband or a daughter to come home, sat paring vegetables, while someone at the back of the house played an accordeon. The yard was littered with boxes, boards, baskets, broken flower-pots, and all sorts of articles. At sight of Monsalvat, the children began rushing from one end of the house to the other yelling that the landlord had come. One might have thought from

their mother's expressions that they were announcing an enemy.

The court was soon full of people, for many of the tenants were home from work at that hour. Monsalvat noticed a girl, rather well dressed, and wearing a large hat, who drew near to one of the groups as he began speaking:

"You showed me a little while ago that you did not trust me; and when I thought it over, I decided you did right, for I hadn't talked to you sincerely, although I tried to. But I didn't know how to tell you what is so simple after all; and it is that I can't help thinking of you all as my brothers, because you *are* my brothers; and I want to free you from needless suffering. I'm not much. I can't do a great deal for you. I can't even give you this house because it's mortgaged; but it's mortgaged so that you can have air and light and sanitary conditions, so that you can live like human beings. All the money raised on this house will be spent on it to make it a good house to live in. Then you will come back to it and you will pay me very little rent, less than you pay now. All I want from you is enough to pay the interest on the mortgage. I could sell this house and rent another; but I cannot have you herded together like cattle! Please don't doubt me. I am not your enemy, I am your friend. . . ."

But they did not understand. "He's some joker," a sharp voice exclaimed. Someone else invited him to shut up and go away. That struck the crowd as humorous and there were bursts of laughter. The children, no longer scared, clapped and shouted.

A creole, who was a typesetter and an anarchist, was about to make a speech in behalf of those who refused to accept the plan, when there was a sudden commotion.

"There's that street-walker turned traitor!" yelled one of the women shaking her fist at the girl Monsalvat had noticed.

Everyone turned on her, insulting her and threatening her. The girl defended herself vigorously; until suddenly she began to cry. This pacified the tenants. Only the women scoffed at her tears, not believing that one such as she could really weep. They would have liked to scratch her and tear out her hair in vengeance for her hats and dresses which seemed so fine to them. How ironical that this girl should be the only one of his audience to try to defend Monsalvat, and to insist that the plan he proposed was to everyone's advantage!

Earlier in his career Monsalvat would have been amazed that of all these people, a good sort after all, no one but this girl should understand him! But now it seemed to him quite natural. He had learned that girls such as she know the full meaning of suffering; and he knew now that grief was the school for kindness and understanding. Moreover, a girl of this profession, even though born into the laboring class, does not belong to it. Through her dealings with the rich, she acquires the ways of the rich and she learns to understand these ways. In addition her experience of men teaches her that, if some of them are possessed of perversity and cruelty hard to conceive of, others have an equally unbelievable kindness of heart.

Monsalvat saw that it was impossible to convince these people by any such methods as those he had tried, and went away. But he returned the next day, and every day; for he was determined to make friends with his tenants. He found work for some of those who needed it, and he was generous to those who could not pay their rent.

One day he talked with the girl who had taken his side in the courtyard scene. She was a short, sad-faced little thing, who behaved so properly in the house that no one could have guessed the nature of her trade. He listened with sympathy but with no particular interest to the story she was telling him of her experiences, until she began talking about Florinda. Then it occurred to him to ask if she knew Nacha. She replied that she did not; but a week or so later she announced to him with a smile that she had just met the girl he had asked her about.

"You called her Nacha, didn't you? A slender girl who lived awhile with Pampa Arnedo? Well, go to this address. The house belongs to a woman who is paralyzed and pushes herself about in a wheel chair. I go there quite often; and Nacha and I are getting to be good friends."

But Monsalvat was no longer listening. He could hear nothing now in the whole wide universe but the words ringing in his heart . . . Nacha found! Nacha at this address! And he actually held the address on a slip of crumpled paper in his hand! Never had Nacha seemed so near as at this moment. . . .

CHAPTER XV

THAT fifteenth of November was, for Nacha Regules, one of the unforgetable days of her life; for it brought her intense happiness and at the same time almost unbearable sorrow. She had not gone to the house of the paralytic the day before, as she was occupied in moving to another boarding house. Doña Lucia's had become distasteful to her since she had discovered that one of the men there was accustomed to spend the afternoon reading in one room while his wife received men in another. She had made inquiries of the other boarders, expressed her indignation, complained to Doña Lucia. The husband thereupon sought an interview with her. He was a vigorous blond, with a yellow mustache, prominent eyes, and a misshapen mouth.

"You have the wrong idea about me," he began. "I'm an honorable man; I never owed a cent to anybody, and what's more, I don't owe anybody a cent now; and what my wife does is her own business, a private matter. . . ."

Nacha did not care to talk with him; so she told him he was quite right and put an end to the interview. However she left the house two days later. On account of an unpleasant incident at Juanita's she ceased going there also; and Julieta introduced her to her friend, the paralytic.

She arrived at this woman's house early one afternoon, and found her alone. The paralytic asked to be read to and Nacha began reading aloud the interminable novel her employer was engaged upon. Nacha had felt depressed and nervous when she arrived, although she had no special reason for feeling so; but this narrative full of absurd adventures, related in an even more absurd style, amused and diverted her. She read for nearly an hour. The paralytic, by no means stupid nor illiterate, had no very high opinion of such hair-raising stories; but she had no other book on hand to entertain herself with. At three o'clock the servant, with a suggestion of mystery in her manner, called her mistress out of the room. The paralytic rolled herself down the hall to the parlor. In a short time she returned and told Nacha someone wanted to see her.

"Who is it? Tell me! If you don't I won't go—I can't—"

Her heart was pounding violently as if it were the clapper of a swinging bell. Fear vibrated through her and an indefinable distress; though she knew that Monsalvat was there . . . and yet . . . trembling, she hesitated, not knowing whether to run away or throw herself into his arms.

"It's a friend of yours. Why do you want to know who it is? I don't know him. He looks all right, and that's enough for me. He's waiting for you. Go along! I tell you he's a friend—but what's the matter with you? Are you afraid of something? If there is anything wrong I won't let you go—"

This put an end to Nacha's indecision. Fear of

not seeing him took possession of her, soul and body, and pushed her down the corridor to the room where he was waiting. She was still trembling; she did not know what she was going to say, nor how she was going to act, and she wanted to cry. Even at the door she hesitated, and felt faint; everything grew blurred around her. She heard the voice of the paralytic following her down the hall, calling, "Go in! Go right in!" She heard a voice clamoring from her heart commanding her to open the door. — Then what happened she never knew. Someone must have opened the door from within, and then closed it. She was trembling and weeping, her hands pressed to her face. She could not see Monsalvat; but she felt his presence beside her.

When she raised her eyes she saw what anguish was, an anguish made up of torturing memories, and the presentiment of a fatality even then rearing insuperable obstacles between them; yet this pain only added to the intense joy of that moment.

"Nacha, why did you drive me away that afternoon? That was the beginning of all the unhappiness I have had since. Perhaps I didn't act as I should have done. Well, then, I ask you to forgive me. Since that day I have thought only of you. The problem of your life has become the problem of mine. I have searched for you in all the places I could think of—and how it hurt, Nacha, not to find you. . . ."

They stood there facing one another, her hands in his. Nacha, in her emotion, lowered her head. She did not know how to act with this man who was so simple and so good. She felt that she too

must be frank and straightforward. She had no right to conceal anything from him, disguise her real thoughts, lie to him. She could not foresee what the outcome of this meeting was to be. Should she let herself be carried along by whatever happened? If Monsalvat should want her, why she was his, body and soul! If not, what then?

And now she was beside him on the sofa, listening to what he was saying; and while he told her of all the efforts he had made to find her he wondered if the woman sitting beside him could be worthy of a passion such as his. Fearful of analyzing his emotion, fearful that his thoughts might dwell too long on this doubt, he tried to put all his feeling and enthusiasm into his story. His words summoned before Nacha, breathlessly listening, the long caravan of his dreams, his life of other years, and his life now; he talked to her of the ideals which tormented him, and without which he could not live; and he told her that at last he had found out the purpose of a man's life: to work for others, to live for those who have need of us.

Nacha was listening in silence. Sometimes she had dreamed of what this meeting of theirs would be like; and she had imagined that nothing at such a moment could serve their emotion but abandonment—kisses, caresses more than humanly sweet. For such, to her then, was love; but now she understood that there was a love greater than that. She was undaunted, but surprised. She did not know whether to delight in it or be saddened by it. The man she was listening to was not of her world; to her he was an enigma, something perhaps too

far above her for her groping comprehension. She could not hope ever to understand him. How could she, poor fallen woman that she was, destitute of every possession, rise to the world of a being such as he? And sadness cast a beautifying shadow over her face. Monsalvat noticed the distress in her eyes and asked why she was troubled. She made a great effort not to burst into tears, using all her strength of will to master her weakness. And she won. Suddenly she perceived that she too was strong, for her will had made its decision.

"I am sad . . . because . . . I do not love you. And I know that I never shall!"

Monsalvat, in complete stupefaction, looked at her. He could not understand. He had always believed this woman loved him. He had felt, as one feels a human presence that can neither be heard nor seen, the presence of a great love between them. And now . . . it was impossible! What was the secret of this baffling mystery? Could Nacha be once more under Arnedo's control? He tried to prove to her that it was himself she loved; and as do all lovers, he presented arguments that sober sense would have declared absurd. The whole strength of his case lay in the tone of his voice, and the sincerity of his emotion.

"No, I do not love. . . . It's no use. I can never love you. You have been very kind to me, very generous, and loyal. I love you as a friend . . . but that is all."

Her words seemed only to show Monsalvat to what extent this passion possessed him. At times he had believed that the feeling animating him was

simply a desire to regenerate this girl who was worthy of a better fate than the one he saw her struggling with, a desire to save another human being from falling to the lowest depths of evil, a desire to accomplish something for the sake of good; since, up to that time he had lived only for himself. At the same time he believed that he loved her; but this love of his seemed to mingle with all these other feelings and desires. Now, with genuine terror, he saw that all his ideals, all his desires of regeneration for her and for himself, were either disappearing, or retreating to the background of his consciousness. At that moment he was nothing but a man in love, and she the adored woman! Nacha was no longer a wanton needing to be saved. All that had not the slightest importance. It was blotted out of his mind, in fact; and there remained only the body and soul of a woman for whom he would have given his life. In his absorption in this tremendous fact he quite forgot himself; and he was shaken by a convulsion that rose from the depths of his soul.

"Yes, you love me, Nacha, and you must belong to me—for life. I promise to make you happy. Whatever tenderness, whatever good there is in me is all for you, Nacha. I'll do whatever you want, whatever you command. . . ."

He was suddenly startled and he checked himself. How far was he going? The idea of offering himself as a husband passed through his mind. He grew red, and was deeply distressed. The idea seemed absurd. Then, as it occurred to him that this was the only means of winning Nacha, he clung

to the idea desperately. She could not refuse such an offer. It would make her understand the extent of this affection. A man of his position, a man of talent, respected in the community, marrying a girl who had offended against its code! Nacha would be thankful; she would know how to value such a sacrifice.

"Nacha," he began solemnly, "I shall make you my wife. You must marry me. . . ."

Nacha was profoundly stirred. She tried to speak and could not, so hard was she fighting for self control. She only could know what a ghastly struggle that was because she knew how she loved him. She had loved him too much before. It was worse now, after hearing his generous words. A voice whispered to her to throw herself into his arms. Something in the very centre of her being was impelling her towards him; but another voice told her she had no right, outcast as she was, to marry this man; that such an act would make her guilty forever of having destroyed him as a part of society. A sacrifice was demanded of her! She must be more generous even than he, subdue herself, suffer, submit to her fate, refrain from dragging him down with her! She did not know where the voice came from. It may have been crying out to her from that afternoon when she first listened to Monsalvat telling her to suffer in order to find redemption; but it was a voice that awed her tormented soul even while it bade her speak and leave this man. Then the strange serenity of sacrifice came to her rescue. She was pale as death, and

smiled so as not to weep. She summoned all the love within her not to let her yield.

"Yes, you must marry me," Monsalvat was insisting desperately.

"No."

"What is it, Nacha? Why are you so strange? I love you, you love me. . . ."

Her will triumphed. She called to mind other moments of her life and made one supreme effort. Then she began to laugh.

"No, I couldn't love you. All this is ridiculous anyway! Such make-believe is unworthy of you. I put you out of my house once before, and I'll do it again. You simply want to make fun of me, because I'm a poor girl, and defenceless. You wanted to make a fool of me, getting me to swallow all this stuff! But now it's my turn to laugh at you, just as I did in the cabaret. I—married! And to you, a crazy man!"

She broke into a laugh that was loud and false and harsh.

Monsalvat remained seated, his hands clasped over his head; he was dizzy with pain, and he could not understand. . . .

"You are mad . . . you have gone mad!" he exclaimed.

Was she really fainting? She saw Monsalvat cover his face with his hands; she turned to the wall and leaned against it, letting herself weep for a brief moment. There was relief in that. With renewed strength, she sat down on a chair and waited. Soon Monsalvat stood up. He too was

pale as he came near her and, barely looking at her, held out his hand.

"Some time . . . you will . . . let me see you?" he faltered.

"No. Why should I? I don't love you. Leave me. And if it's true that you love me, forget me as soon as you can. Go, please! I am ill, and want to be alone. . . ."

Monsalvat did not insist. He could not have done so. He took his hat and went away, stumbling like a man who has come to the end of his strength. One might have thought him sick, or crazy, or perhaps drunk, as he staggered out. Crossing that threshold was like wrenching his soul from his body; and in the little parlor that knew only shabbiness and shame, grief remained, lending it a dignity it had never known before.

Nacha could no longer hold her anguish at bay. She snatched off her hat with a frantic gesture, and tore it into bits. Moaning and weeping she fled into one of the other rooms and threw herself down on the bed.

The cripple rolled her wheel chair to the door and looked in. Believing that she understood Nacha's trouble, she did not disturb her, but went away again. She talked to the girls awhile; but the tragedy she saw close at hand saddened her; for it reminded her of old intimate griefs of her own. She too, in her youth, had known love, in far away Italy; and that love had been maimed and destroyed. After that, dishonor and vice seemed a small matter; yet, at times, even now, she went

back in thought to the home of her childhood, so different in its simple beauty from the wretchedness of her present surroundings. But here she was, old, crippled, with no choice but to go on in the familiar rut. Why let herself be saddened then? She had known life, and found that melancholy had a bad effect on the liver! So she chatted with the girls, merrily, as was her custom whenever she felt a touch of sadness.

But someone came in, and asked for Nacha. The cripple rolled her chair into the bedroom where the girl was still weeping, her head almost hidden by the pillow.

"Nacha child! Don't cry that way! Why let yourself suffer so? No man is worth it. You know that. You are worth more than the best of them, you have a good heart . . . and they. . . ."

She muttered an obscene word to herself and began to laugh.

"Come, Nacha, someone wants to see you. They are all alike! No one of them is worth more than another. They're all rotten—just good to ruin women and then desert them. Come, child, come—here's a friend!"

She patted Nacha on the shoulder, and told her she would send her caller in. Nacha suddenly sat up. She wiped away her tears and said quietly, "No, señora. Don't send him. I am going away for good."

"But, child, why? Are you angry with me?" the old cripple exclaimed, astonished by Nacha's tone. "Aren't you ever coming back to my house?"

"Neither to your house nor to any other. I am not angry. You have been very kind to me, and I shall never forget it."

"Well then. . . ." The woman did not know what to make of the girl's words.

Nacha was silent while she smoothed her hair, and straightened her dress. Then she kissed the cripple, took both her hands and said, her lips quivering with pain:

"It's because . . . I want to be worthy . . . of that man's love. . . ."

"Oh, I see. You want to be respectable for awhile, and then get married. . . ."

The cripple spoke with the certainty of a woman who understands what she is talking about. Nacha's expression, however, indicated that her purpose was not quite as the cripple supposed.

"What is it then? Tell me. You know I like you, child, and respect you. And I'd do for you anything you ask. If you want to live decent, and need money, I'll give it to you — I'll save so I can!"

Nacha was touched.

"You are good, señora. I thank you from my very heart; and because I know how good you are, I'll tell you. No, I'm not going to get married. I couldn't let him marry me. But he loves me—so much! And if he gives me such great love, I want to be decent. Not to get married, no, just to be worthy of living in his thoughts, and in his heart. . . ."

The paralytic drew the girl's head down to her twisted old lips and kissed her. Freeing herself

from the woman's embrace, Nacha hastily left the room.

As she fled down the stairs she realized that it was many years since she had felt as happy as at that moment!

CHAPTER XVI

ONE afternoon as Torres was lunching with Ruiz de Castro in a restaurant on the Esmeralda he thought he caught a glimpse of Nacha.

As a matter of fact it was Nacha. She was returning to the store where she had been employed some six years earlier, and with her were a number of other girl employees, for it was nearly two o'clock, the end of the lunch hour. Torres would have gone up to speak to her if he had been alone; but Ruiz was relating his adventures with that plump lady who had carried on so persistent a discussion with Monsalvat at de Castro's dinner party, and had so eloquently defended established institutions.

"You don't say!" murmured Torres, absently; for all his attention was fixed on the slender figure hovering in front of the huge shop door which was about to open and swallow her up.

"She's a wonder, my friend," proclaimed Ruiz, who was given to committing indiscretions in words as well as actions. "What passion! and how she can sob!"

When Torres reached his house he went at once to talk to Monsalvat who was now living with him. After the serious illness that had followed close upon his interview with Nacha, Torres had taken him in hand, and when he discovered that his patient

was paying no attention to doctor's orders, had carried him off to his own home where he could insist on obedience. He persuaded Monsalvat to ask for a two months' leave, for there was no doubt that he was suffering from brain-fag and serious nervous derangement.

Torres had a theory that Monsalvat's condition was not entirely due to his passion for Nacha. He knew the history of his friend's moral struggles, and he believed that the causes of Monsalvat's illness were numerous and complex. The latter's abrupt change of attitude towards life could not but profoundly affect his whole nature. Following this, had come several months of constant self-reproach, and self-disgust for the uselessness and selfishness of his life up to that time. He went as far as to blame himself for his inability to transform the world. Torres had tried, vainly, to prove to him that he was far from useless, and that no one could have called him selfish. His conduct compared surprisingly well with that of other men of his generation; and his reputation indicated general recognition of that fact. Monsalvat protested that all this might be true from a superficial and worldly view of his life, but it only proved how false were society's standards.

"Useless and selfish," Monsalvat repeated. "Not less so than prominent politicians or ranch owners, lawyers, and men in society. We are all selfish. I do not condemn myself only. I condemn all the rest as well. The world is full of evil, selfishness, meanness—and I have shared in it all. That is why I despise myself, and abhor my past life."

Torres wisely kept silent, for fear of exciting his patient.

It was clear also that the knowledge of his sister's mode of life, and of the degradation his mother had fallen into before her death, had seriously injured Monsalvat's nervous system. The scene with Irene, his worrying about the tenement, the anxieties of that search through the world of fallen women, the sight of so many horrors, had all left their mark on him; and finally the shock of Eugenia's death, intensified by the manner in which he had learned of it, had played its part in undermining his health. Obviously his love for Nacha, his unsuccessful attempt to save her, the knowledge that she was leading a vicious life, perhaps because of him, were the principal causes of his breakdown, but all these other matters played an important part in bringing about his present condition.

Now, however, after two months of rest and quiet, Monsalvat was beginning to be himself. The companionship of Torres had done him a great deal of good. The doctor made him eat, gave him stimulants when he needed them, encouraged him to spend most of his time out of doors and even stayed up with him on the nights when he was unable to sleep.

Torres might have accomplished a complete cure, had not the evil that flourishes in certain human hearts prevented. Monsalvat had recently received some anonymous letters, four in all. One of them insulted him by insulting his mother, another called him to account for living on women, and being an anarchist! The other two were content with inti-

mating that he belonged in a lunatic asylum, and would soon be put there. The effect of these letters was to excite him so that he could neither sleep nor eat. The first especially reawakened in him his life-long obsession, cruelly reminding him of what was, in his estimation, the reason for his moral bankruptcy.

The doctor wondered who could have sent these letters, for Monsalvat's position was not such as to excite envy. At the Ministry his new ideas had become known, and Monsalvat was looked upon with hostility or contempt. Even the Minister mistrusted him now. In the social circles where he was once respected, he had lost all consideration. Ercasty was methodically discrediting him, with admirable persistence and thoroughness. Informed by mutual acquaintances of Monsalvat's views with respect to Nacha and other girls of her sort, and of that frantic search through houses of ill-fame, he confirmed the rumor that Monsalvat had fallen very low indeed. At first he was content with making insinuations; but finally he came out with the bald statement that Monsalvat was a vulgar exploiter of women. Of course there were not lacking those who accused him of participating in frightful anarchist plots, and preparing bombs for wholesale assassinations.

Financially too he was ruined. The forty thousand of the mortgage raised on his property had melted away. His mother's debts, the mulatto's blackmail, Moreno's incessant appeals, had taken several thousand. His excursion through the city's public houses had cost him four thousand *pesos*.

Ten thousand *pesos* had gone for improvements on the tenement. Monsalvat decided he would have to sell the building, for his salary was barely enough for his own expenses, and his tenants either paid no rent or paid very little.

That afternoon Monsalvat was reading as he lay in bed. The book beside him was the New Testament. On his face was reflected something of the serenity of late afternoon. When Torres opened the window to let in air and sunshine, everything in the room seemed to draw a breath, and grow animate. A bar of light like a luminous golden coverlet spread over the bed.

"Look at that!" exclaimed the doctor. "And you spend your time shut up here almost in the dark. You'll never get well that way. You ought to go to Palermo, stay out in the sun—and not read or write a line."

"I know what I need," replied his friend quietly.

"What do you need? You are always mysterious."

Monsalvat went on reading. Torres remained with him for a few moments and then withdrew without a word.

The doctor had been observing his friend for over a month, with constantly growing curiosity. Monsalvat's intelligence seemed to have grown sharper and deeper. He was still weak in body but his mind was keener than ever. He reasoned with irrefutable logic, and divined his opponent's arguments at a word. Torres attributed this mental fitness to mental exercise. His patient talked with no one but his host, did not go out, read very little; but all

day long he was occupied in thinking and remembering, trying to interpret his past life, trying to understand the significance of the life he was then experiencing. He spent hours analyzing the persons he knew, and with extraordinary penetration. Torres was more than once overcome with amazement when Monsalvat guessed his thoughts.

"Why should you be startled?" Monsalvat asked him on a certain occasion. "What has happened is simply this. I am living from within now. Up to six months ago I lived from without, superficially; and the life I lived seemed to be the life of other people rather than my own. It was an objective, a false, a lying kind of life. Just like your own and that of nearly everyone. A materialistic kind of life, never transcending the commonplace, devoid of mystery, and of genuinely spiritual anxiety. But now my eyes are open and I begin to understand. I have analyzed myself, I have looked within; and I have discovered a great many things there that I knew nothing of. I know now what there is in me, and what parts of it are worth something, and what I must give to others. And I even begin to suspect why I am alive!"

"I knew before that. . . ."

Torres stopped abruptly, not caring to end his sentence. He pretended to have forgotten what he wanted to say.

"Why don't you go on? Have you really forgotten what was on the tip of your tongue? Well, I know what it was. You were going to say that all that happened this past year, and the love I found, would lead me straight to . . . mysticism!"

"What? No, no, not that, exactly."

But that was exactly what he had been thinking. Monsalvat knew how abhorrent to a man as orderly and normal, as submissive to society's dicta, as Torres, the word "mysticism" must be. The doctor had come to admit society's responsibility for much of the unhappiness in the world; but he had no sympathy for those heroic acts necessary to drive out injustice. He admired Monsalvat but at the same time considered his passion for redeeming others a form of insanity. According to Torres a normal man should accept things as they are. The rebel, he who at sight of the suffering of life's victims, breaks out into indignant accusations or takes up some useless but heroic work, was, in his estimation, a madman.

Since his recent glimpse of Nacha, Torres had been anxious to talk to her. Once or twice he watched the girls coming out of the shop. He saw Nacha again, but it was very evident that she avoided him. Convinced that Nacha did not care to hear any news of Monsalvat, whose friendship with him she must have known, he gave up his attempt to communicate with her.

The days went by. Monsalvat never spoke of Nacha and little by little Torres came to the conclusion that he had forgotten her.

One morning, in March, Torres went to his guest's room at a very early hour, to dissuade him from going away.

"Why leave me, Monsalvat? Stay here a couple of months longer, until you are quite all right again. The kind of breakdown you're just getting over is

no joke, my dear boy. And where are you going without a cent to your name, eh? Back to your quixotic notions about righting all humanity's wrongs, and redeeming people who have nothing to redeem about them? That's all nonsense, and leads nowhere. One man alone can't accomplish anything. All you can do is harm, filling the heads of those poor people with wild ideas. No, my son. The world is full of evil. Well, what's to be done? You have to take it as it is, and get what good you can out of it, and—"forward, march!" Eh?

Monsalvat did not reply. He lay on his side, his elbow resting on the pillow, his hand on his breast, and his eyes turned towards the window. But he was not looking at what was out there beyond him: he was looking within, searching his own heart and the hearts of a multitude of other human beings whom he saw there standing between him and his friend. The doctor's words reached him from far, far away—so far that he scarcely understood them. Meanwhile the window seemed to be catching fire, making its offering of light to Monsalvat as from a golden, quivering sheet of flame!

The doorbell rang. Without moving, Monsalvat said:

"That's the postman. He is bringing a letter from Nacha—for you."

Torres smiled at this prophecy; a forced smile, however, for he feared that it might be true. He got up and was about to leave the room when the maid came in with a letter. The doctor signed the receipt for which the messenger was waiting, placing it for that purpose on the table near Monsalvat's

bed. He did not notice that Monsalvat's eyes were fixed intently on the small bit of paper. Then he opened the letter and looked at its signature, disconcerted. Monsalvat laughed, enjoying his friend's confusion.

"It's from Ruiz de Castro. He wants to see me . . . some affair of his . . . he doesn't say what . . ." stammered Torres, thrusting the letter into his pocket. Then he went out, embarrassed and perplexed, while Monsalvat smiled to himself.

For the letter actually did come from Nacha! She wrote that she wanted to see Torres, but not at the entrance to the shop. From her letter it appeared that she did not know where Monsalvat was. She wanted to find out—that was why she wrote about him. She had learned that he was ill; "Was it true?" she asked; and "was she to blame?"

That evening Torres went to the lodgings at the address Nacha had sent him. He found a respectable house, the tenants of which appeared to be shop employees and their families.

"You don't know what I've been through," murmured Nacha. "We met one afternoon, and I—"

Torres knew something of this meeting.

"But you don't know why I acted as I did." Nacha continued. "It was because I loved him; because I didn't want to do him harm. So that he, distinguished and fine as he is, shouldn't be ruined by associating his life with that of a . . . someone like myself. . . . You see? Since that day I have lived straight; and somehow, I'm still alive, although really I am dying . . . with grief. . . . But this I accept, for his sake, and to make up for

the kind of life I led before. I accept it so that he may not have to suffer, so that he will forget me, and be happy, and go on with the kind of life he ought to have—even though I die of it. What good am I?"

They were alone, facing each other over a small table, lit by a small lamp which had been pushed to one side. Torres felt the shadows of the room pressing around his throat, choking him. Nacha's face alone stood out, catching the light. The doctor was thinking of the frightful pranks Destiny can play.

But this emotion passed, and the man of the world, laden with prejudices, falsehood, cruelties—and good, withal, replaced the plain and honest man of feeling.

"You couldn't know what I've been through," Nacha repeated. "Since that afternoon I have earned my living by work. First there were days of discouragement, when I went hungry. Then I found employment in a shop. Eleven hours a day and thirty dollars a month! I get a bonus too. But there are fines for the slightest thing. Altogether I earn about sixty dollars more or less—there's no rest during those eleven hours. Sometimes they send me with a load of goods up to the fifth floor. We aren't allowed to use the elevators. It isn't a gay life, you see. But it's for him, so I don't mind! Not so that he'll love me—I'm not worthy of living with him—just to deserve, even at a distance, a little of the love he has for me!"

Torres looked away from her; it occurred to him that this change in Nacha was a danger for Mon-

salvat. He believed he must save his friend once for all, and to accomplish that required a lie. He reflected that it was really too bad that deceit should at times be necessary, even to accomplish good results. Something inquired of him if he really believed that the purpose he had in view was "good." He hesitated a moment; but he remembered the world's opinion, the world's morality, the world's sentiments. He turned towards Nacha, and with a gesture as if he was casting from him an unpleasant thought, and in a hard voice, he said:

"You must not see him again, Nacha, ever. Anyway, he has forgotten you. Yes! He is in love with another woman, and is thinking of getting married. You don't want to wreck his plans, eh?"

She could not see. Everything was dark. She felt a "yes" come mechanically from her throat, and she put out a hand, so inert, that it barely felt the rapid pressure of another hand. Then came the noise of a closing door, and the sound of retreating footsteps. But darkness remained, empty . . . and endless.

As she sat at the small table, her senses dull to everything, she did not hear a knock at her door; nor was she aware that a man had come in and was there, before her, waiting. A sudden leap of her heart, and a flash of consciousness made her raise her eyes. She thought she must be feverish, in a delirium! She would have cried out, but something within her, that overpowered her, muffled her voice.

"Nacha!" he said.

"Is this true? It is not a dream? Not a dream?"

They were face to face, but they could not speak. No words could express what shone in Monsalvat's eyes, and echoed in Nacha's breathless weeping. The room seemed to fill with memories of the distant past, scenes fraught with sorrow, and ancient longings, taking on a strange, mysterious life, like an old temple that has heard the prayers of centuries.

Nacha's tears were for what had been, and what ought to have been; for what she had not wanted to be, and what the world had forced her to become. Monsalvat sat at her side, caressing her hands; but he saw facing him the two men he had been in his lifetime, and he demanded an account of them for what his life had been, looking into their very souls, cursing them; and before Nacha passed the different women who had dwelt in her body, the bad woman, and the good, the victim and the weakling.

And in that dim light, they understood one another, these two suffering human beings. The light in the heart of each shone out to the other. Their heads drew close together. Without knowing it, without seeking it, they kissed gently, like children of one mother.

CHAPTER XVII

MONSALVAT that very afternoon had taken lodgings in the house in order to be near Nacha. As Torres signed it he read the receipt of the special delivery letter; and he hurried to the Messenger Service Bureau and there learned Nacha's address. When he reached the building where she lived he noticed a sign announcing a furnished room to let in this tenement which was an old family dwelling, now rented out to numerous lodgers. Monsalvat took the room on the top floor facing the street. Thus, it happened that when he appeared in Nacha's quarters he was already a tenant in the same house.

Torres' efforts to find out what had become of Monsalvat were all unsuccessful. He even wrote to Nacha, who replied that she had not seen him nor had any news of him. These falsehoods did not much trouble her conscience. She wanted to keep Monsalvat near her, have him for herself alone; and she was fearful of his friends, of his associates at the ministry, of everything which threatened to interrupt her possession of him. When, in the afternoon, she came home from work, she could scarcely breathe with the anxiety and the fear of no longer finding him there.

But the emotion she felt was to all appearances

purely fraternal. Suffering had spiritualized it. The first kiss had been the last. Nacha knew how little the physical aspect of love meant. She could not offer her lover something of as little price as her body. To Monsalvat she would give her heart and soul and whatever good there was in her; her tenderness, as immeasurable as space, and her suffering, as deep as the sea. Nor did he desire her. Nacha was no longer a mere woman to him; she had become a symbol, tremendously significant, of all women who pay the penalty she was paying, of those victims rejected by society—daughters of the mire and of human misery; and she was his sister as well. If at times he desired Nacha, the desire was fleeting, a passing sentiment. He knew that it was this sentiment which had drawn him towards her; and in this fact he saw a proof of the wisdom of instinct, of nature's fundamental soundness; for desire had, in moments of vacillation and uneasiness of conscience, led him to the right road. Now he was no longer a man of the world, nor a distinguished lawyer, nor anything else that he had been. As far as the world was concerned, he was a ruined man. But in his own eyes he had saved himself, found a purpose for his life; the purpose to give everything he had to others, and to suffer for them. What did all the rest matter if, in this course of conduct, he found what he recognized as the "Good" he craved?

And so time passed. Nacha went to the shop in the morning, and returned at night. Monsalvat went out only to go to the Ministry, and to offer relief to those in great need. When he came back

from the office he gathered the children in the house together and taught them to read; and his evenings were for Nacha, for long waking dreams—a book in his hands, and silence keeping watch over them like a faithful dog. His evenings were for that idealized love which Nacha too now understood.

But one evening Nacha told him of the doubts that troubled her. Why sacrifice one's life, and tranquillity, and happiness, for others? With so much wretchedness in the world, what could one man's slow and small accomplishment matter? And why give one's whole soul to something that offered no visible reward?

"Nacha," he replied, "to sacrifice ourselves for others is a duty. It is the only reason for our living. If we all accepted this principle, life would be inconceivably beautiful. And what other principle makes our lives consistent with our opinions and our ideals—granted we have opinions and ideals? It is an obligation we owe to those from whom we have taken their share of happiness. There are not many who pay this debt, not many who comply with this law. People not only resist the law of love implicit in sacrifice, but they will to be selfish, and bad. But doesn't that make it all the more our duty, Nacha, to do what we can? We must win forgiveness for the wrongs we do our brothers, for the guilt of society in which we all share."

He stopped, and looked dreamily before him, as though he saw some luminous object in the distance. Then, after a moment of silence, he added:

"The work of one individual has tremendous

value as an example. Good work is not lost. It arouses other souls; and each one of these will waken others, who, but for them, would continue to sleep. So, little by little, daylight will come; injustice will cease; and poverty will be a word."

Monsalvat was at work on two plays which Nacha helped him to copy. They proved to be somewhat incoherent compositions, full of anguish, and love, and pity. They excited keen interest among the theatrical managers to whom he submitted them but no one cared to produce them. Some one of the readers who examined them called the plays "anti-social"; and they were generally considered dangerous to established order. In truth, they contained too much human sympathy: but it may well be that justice, or even simple honesty, is a serious menace to society!

One Sunday afternoon Julieta came to call on Nacha. She was no longer the smiling Julieta of old. Bad luck had been haunting her footsteps of late; and for the last few weeks she had known what it was to go hungry. While she was telling Nacha her troubles Monsalvat came in. Julieta did not know him, and stopped short.

"It is my friend," said Nacha. "He can help you. Go on!"

Julieta, reassured as much by a glance at Monsalvat as by Nacha's words, told how her small savings had all been spent to help Sara who had suddenly developed a horrible disease.

"I thought I could earn more if I had to," said Julieta, "but I haven't been able to. I've had to give up my room at Lavalle Street; and they are

going to put me out of the lodging-house where I have been staying, because my rent isn't paid. I can't go out on the street! But I'm discouraged. What can I do? I had hoped to get away from this life somehow; and now it seems as though I would have to go deeper into it than ever before—and after seeing what has happened to poor Sara! Oh, I can't bear to think of it!"

"Everything is going to come out right for you," Monsalvat said to her gently. "What little I have is yours. Don't thank me. No, I shall be angry if you do. It isn't mine after all. No one is the *owner* of money. It's stupid to think so! Don't lose heart. I'm going to take care of all your troubles. No, it isn't only for you I am doing this. It's for myself, you see."

Monsalvat had received his salary that afternoon. He had just paid his rent; and he gave all that remained to Julieta, who let herself be persuaded finally to accept it. Then he left the girls alone.

As he went out of the door, he found, leaning against the wall opposite, his legs crossed, an ill-favored individual who looked at him with an impudent and sinister smile. Nacha could not endure this cross-eyed and thoroughly unprepossessing loafer, who, it was rumored, was a police spy. His small, close-set eyes, low forehead, crushed-in nose and vicious expression all suggested the jail bird; and Nacha could never see him without having a ghastly vision of all the crimes a man is capable of; nor was she alone in fearing him. But she learned on a certain occasion that he knew her past life, and

the discovery kept her awake many nights. As the days passed without her hearing anything more from him, she put aside the worst of her fears. The man watched Monsalvat closely and even followed him on the street.

When Monsalvat returned to Nacha's room, Julieta had gone. Nacha was depressed and this he naturally attributed to Julieta's trouble. But Nacha was tormented by various concerns of her own, of which she never spoke. One was her wretched poverty. To eke out her salary she took in sewing, and was often at work until midnight. At a word from her Monsalvat would have given her every cent he had, and gladly have gone penniless and hungry. But Nacha had told him that she was earning enough to live on. She would not speak of her difficulties; besides if she did, Monsalvat would work himself into a fever of indignation against the exploiters of women workers.

But Nacha had other troubles too. Latterly a terrifying idea had taken possession of her: she had seen Pampa, and believed that he was again pursuing her. One afternoon as she left the store she caught a glimpse of him, and she slipped into the thick of the crowd waiting for a street car. When she saw, however, that he had stopped on the corner and was looking this way and that for her, she hastily got into a cab. Once again she saw him prowling in the vicinity of the shop as she was going to work. She was terrified, and clutched her companion's arm so tight the girl gave an exclamation of pain. After that she met Arnedo every day. Sometimes he had a friend with him. Just

the day before, as she was going into the store a little late, and alone, he spoke to her. Strange that he should remember her so tenderly! His voice had grown soft as he spoke her name, and his eyes seemed to look deep into hers. She trembled; and her fear prevented her from uttering a word; but, with terror, she realized that she could never feel indifferent to this man.

And at home, sitting opposite Monsalvat, she suffered torment, for the thought of Arnedo would not give her any peace. Her conscience seemed to have become an Inquisition; her thoughts, instruments of torture that hurt her physically, clouded her eyes, and kept her from working over her seams. Once, at midnight, while she was sewing, the evil thought which until then had remained something vague, distant, nebulous, suddenly took definite and horrible form. She struggled not to think what she did not want to think. She would rather have died than think it.

For it had occurred to her there in her room that night that it could not be her destiny to live the life that she was then leading. If it were, why couldn't she be happy? Why couldn't she have even peace? Why so much suffering? What was in store for her? What was she looking forward to, there? She told herself that this was only a transitory stage in her life, only a bridge perhaps, leading to something else. But whither? Why was she living there near that man? Marry him? No, she had never taken that seriously! That was a beautiful dream—a dream that she had no right to! Be his mistress then? Oh that, never! Nor did he

desire it. Then she wondered what this emotion that she felt for him could be. Did she love him? She admired him: never had she believed there could be such a great soul as his. To her he represented all the Goodness in the world. But did she love him the other way—with her senses? Yes, perhaps, when she first met him in the cabaret! But not now! Now he was like a father, a brother, a son. She loved him too much to love him that way. And with what pity she loved him! For he was wasting his life for her, giving up his position, his friends, neglecting even his work, living alone and in poverty, all for her! Then the evil thought returned. Supposing she should run away? Supposing she should feel perfectly certain that she was destined not to be good, and should return to the old life? And there was Arnedo! What could he want of her? She compared the two men, Monsalvat, all soul, all gentleness, all idealism; and Arnedo, physical strength, brutality, materialism. Monsalvat attracted her soul, her thoughts—the best in her. She trembled to think that Pampa might again attract her physically, inflame her senses, rouse all the desires in short, which were the worst in her! She shuddered at the thought that Arnedo might regain the control over her he once possessed: and in this torment she wept for Monsalvat—and for herself.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE afternoon in June, distressed by the oppressive humidity and suffocating heat that precedes a storm, Monsalvat went out on the balcony of his room, and from there he saw Nacha coming home. Her slow dragging step startled him, seeming to announce a catastrophe.

He met her in the court and asked what had happened. Nacha, speechless, held out her hand to him. She seemed crushed, defeated by life. Monsalvat felt certain that something serious must have happened, or Nacha, reserved as she always was, would never have clung in such fashion to his hand in the presence of others. Heads were poked out of the windows and the women and some of the men talking or working in the *patio* looked at one another and began to laugh. However, Monsalvat and Nacha were too much preoccupied by their anxiety to separate. Monsalvat took Nacha to her room, supporting her by an arm; and there she told him what had happened.

She had for some days recently felt tired and ill, the result of standing so many hours at a stretch, and so frequently climbing three or four pairs of stairs, as the employees were not allowed to use the elevators. That afternoon she had been ordered to carry a mannequin down several flights. She

demurred, saying that her strength would give out; but the manager turned a deaf ear. Laden with the heavy wooden figure, she reached the bottom of the first flight, staggering and faint with the strain. She set it down resolved to go no further with it; but a message reached her to the effect that if she did not comply with her orders, she would be dismissed. So she attempted to go down another flight, some of the employees laughing at the ridiculous figure she presented, others silently pitying her. She tried to pull herself together for a final effort, went down a few steps, and then—she did not know how it happened—she fell, and rolled down a half flight to the landing. When she regained consciousness, she found herself surrounded by employees. The manager, watch in hand, was observing her, and the mannequin lay in pieces near by. She asked to go home and was told that she would forfeit her pay for the hours she was absent, also for the time during which she had lain unconscious. That explained the manager's presence with his watch! And somehow this last cruelty, trifling as it was, took the heart out of her. What was she but a slave, worth only so many hours work to her owner? Then she was also told that she must pay for the mannequin.—Pay for it? Cold, frightened, wide-eyed, she had scarcely understood what they were saying. Pay, yes, pay so much every month, ten dollars a month knocked off her salary. That was what they meant. "How was she going to live on what was left?" "You can manage," they replied. "That's your business, not ours." She had no strength to argue the matter. Money, tradition,

power were all against her. Probably they had right on their side too, as they had everything else!

When Monsalvat left her, he found Mauli and some others of his neighbors near the door. They grimaced at him. The caretaker, who had just left the group, to avoid Fernando's seeing him, stepped into a doorway and turned his back. Monsalvat passed by quite indifferent to the manoeuvre.

But no sooner was he out of sight than the man turned around and went to Nacha's door and knocked. Nacha, still crying, let him in. He was a person of disagreeable aspect, due chiefly to his over-meek and righteous expression, and his trick of keeping his eyes on the ground, and never looking at anyone he was speaking to. He never laughed, and walked very softly, with his arms close to his body. To his tenants he was merciless. Should they perchance fall two weeks behind with their rent, they were dispossessed even though sick in bed. A coward, he could nevertheless always count on the protection of the police in case of need.

"I have come . . . Miss—(or would Madame, perhaps, be more appropriate?) to say that I am obliged—to give you notice. I hope you understand. Your conduct in this house cannot be allowed by any one who takes his responsibilities—as I hope I take mine—seriously. My landlady has the utmost confidence in me, and, under the circumstances. . . ."

Nacha did not understand. She looked at the deceptive, hypocritical face, trying to guess what words it was going to utter. She could not imagine what this man wanted of her.

"There now—you're playing innocent. Well, I don't like to explain too much in detail. . . . It would be better if you noticed for yourself that this is a decent house, and it isn't a house where women —ah—women, such as you. . . . Ha! Ha! In short, Miss, or Missus, no more calls from gentlemen! If you want that kind of thing, you know, there are . . . well, there are places. . . ."

"You are mistaken!" cried Nacha, suddenly springing to her feet.

The man lowered his eyes with an exaggeration of humility, and seemed to shrink, as he replied: "Of course we are all human, and of course, likely to make mistakes. Ha ha! But we know something about you, Miss. No, I'm not saying anything . . . but. . . . Can you deny having lived in a certain "house" on — Street, eh? Am I mistaken about that, eh? Ha ha!"

Nacha, in a fury, drew near him. She was impelled to strike him and drive him out of there by main force; but she thought of the scandal it would cause, and of Monsalvat; and she remembered that the odious creature in front of her had certain powers, as representing the landlady: he was the figurehead for a multi-millionairess, ruling for her, collecting her rents. . . . To prevent her losing thirty or forty dollars he put the hungry or the sick out on the street, or widows with their broods of children. It was his function to turn over the entire amount of monthly rent to the fine lady, his employer, so that she could eventually distribute handsome sums to convents and sisterhoods!

"For all of me, Miss, you could stay. I don't

interfere with people's business. But the landlady—ha-ha!—doesn't want women of your kind. . . ."

Nacha was losing her self-possession, and with a scream of anger, she broke out, "Shut up, you devil! What kind? Get out of here this instant, you coward!"

He opened the door and from the threshold shouted so that every one could hear him, but all the while keeping his appearance of humility:

"What kind? Your kind, Missus, and we don't want none of your kind here!"

Nacha threw herself on the floor, trembling, and with no strength left; and she heard a laugh, cruel and startling, coming up from the *patio*. It went through her like a knife. Her whole being rebelled. She wanted to shout out in protest; but she could only be vanquished. Then a chill crept in through her body to her very heart and soul. She shook for hours in its grip.

Monsalvat knew nothing of what had happened; for it chanced that he had lessons to give that evening and during the moment when he stopped at Nacha's room on his return from supper, she did not let him see how ill she was. He was still concerned about her accident at the store, and urged her not to take it too much to heart. He was going to sell his tenement very soon, and whatever money he received from it would be hers.

Three nights a week Monsalvat held classes for some of the workmen in the district. He had begun with three or four pupils, but they had increased in numbers until now he had a class of twenty or thirty. They all knew how to read. He talked to

them about history, about the different countries he had travelled in, about ethics. His simple eloquence attracted these simple workers. As he commented upon some of the day's occurrences, or a passage in some book, he summoned before them a vision of a new society, of an era of love, and justice. At such times his voice rang with human sympathy and a strange mystic fervor.

But on that night Monsalvat could not speak to his class in this strain; for there was hate in his heart. The cruel treatment Nacha had suffered in the store had stirred him to the depths of his consciousness, and a multitude of details accumulated there and forgotten, had risen to the surface, looming large with sudden significance.

As the workmen filed into the room they shook hands with Monsalvat and exchanged a few words with him. He always asked after their children, or their wives and mothers. Then most of them sat down. A few preferred to stand, leaning against the wall.

"Today," he was saying, "I came to understand something which I have never understood before, though it is something true, something fundamental! I have been talking to you about love's power to change the world. Well, I was wrong! Love cannot transform the world. It is nineteen hundred years since the world heard the most sublime definition of love. None since has surpassed it, for none can. Yet this love, in spite of the example given us with its definition, has accomplished nothing. What then can we accomplish? If the words that were spoken those many years ago have never been

understood by mankind, that must mean that men will never understand any words of love. So then, we must preach hate. For to preach love is to become the accomplice of injustice. To preach love is to work for the preservation of things as they are, to wait for the advent of a day that will never come! Love is almost always passive, inert. Hate is action. Hate will give us strength; and with this strength we shall succeed in winning the world to love. This then is what we must do. Through hate, move on to love. Through violence, the instrument of hate, impose peace, fraternity, justice! Moreover, when we use hate and violence, we who are the underdogs, you and I, my friends, will only be using the methods used toward us. Those who control, despise and hate us, and use violence against us every moment of their lives. They have organized hate and violence. They use force not only in secret, but in broad daylight. I have seen how they use it on the human body, its life and health, imposing monstrous and destructive tasks on human beings! I have seen how they use it on human minds, condemning them to eternal ignorance! I have seen them use it on women, and on children. Even those who come to us with gentle words, hate us and only want our servitude to continue. No, my friends. Love will not set us free. Will the British shareholder who receives enormous dividends for his capital invested in our railroads, in our large stores, in our packing houses, listen to the voice of love? Will the tenement landlords who throw women and sick children out on the street listen to the voice of love? Do you believe they

will? Will they listen to any language other than that of check and bank note? But there is another language which they can understand even though they don't want to, the language of our violence!"

His pupils listened, motionless, but stirred. Some of them seemed uneasy, as at the memory of a wrong; others looked at their teacher with pity and with pain; others appeared rapt in a vision of new worlds. It was evident too that more than one of them had difficulty in understanding, and that nearly all of them were trying to establish a relation between their own past and the words they were listening to. For they had led lives of suffering always. They knew squalor, and hunger; but with the years they had grown accustomed to misery and poverty.

There was a pause. No one moved. No one, not even Monsalvat, dared to speak. Something impressive was there among those men, like a visible presence, and they seemed all to be gazing at it; and it was everywhere. It was in each one of them, and in their comrade's eyes, in the echo of their teacher's words that haunted their ears, in the deep stillness of the room, in the rapid beating of their hearts.

The silence continued. One man tried to speak, but he looked about him at his listeners, and said no more. At last they understood that there was nothing to say, and they all got up simultaneously. One by one they shook hands with Monsalvat. Never had those hands of theirs seemed so warm, so vibrant, so vigorous. Some of the men had tears in their eyes, one could not have told whether from joy or sadness.

When his class had gone, Monsalvat felt that he had accomplished an act of justice, that he had taken a step, at least, toward the world's transformation. Living as he did on sentiment and imagination, with little or no sense of reality, he believed in the efficacy of the vague abstract formulas he preached. In his ardent desire for a better world there was a deal of mysticism: he lacked concrete rules, plans of action, the realization that discipline is the basis of progress. In his individualistic and lyric exaltation, he imagined that by means of the just and tragic emotions of revolt, such as he had that evening preached, and only through such means, could a better society be brought about.

The next day he received a summons from the police. He was not disturbed; but he supposed that the secret-service had reported him. On arriving at headquarters he was led to the chief's office, where he found himself face to face with an official personage who affected Napoleonic brusqueness and thoroughness, and tried hard, in spite of a sharp, thin face, to look like that Conqueror. Monsalvat knew him, which did not prevent the chief's adopting a condescending manner towards him.

"It's a bad plan, my good fellow, to talk as you've been doing," the officer said, slowly walking up and down, his hand on his sword-belt, and putting a degree more of stiffness into his rigidly erect carriage. "Dangerous theories. . . . It's incomprehensible to me that a man of your station in life should plot against our government, against our country—as if conditions here were not the best to be found anywhere! As if anyone who wanted to

couldn't become rich in this country! You people get a few ideas out of anarchist literature, and lose your heads over them. All that stuff comes from your old and rotting Europe. It has no possible application in a country like this, where every man has a chance, where no one need go hungry, where no one can complain of injustice. . . ."

Monsalvat, who was staring hard at the orator, started, then looked his amazement. Surely the man was joking! But no, he was perfectly serious, and perfectly convinced. Monsalvat then remembered having heard this identical speech a hundred, a thousand times before. Worse than that, he remembered having written those very words himself! It was not likely that he would be convinced by all this, nor attempt an answer. Even the Chief of Police was aware of that, and ended the interview. Before dismissing Monsalvat, however, he made him read a social law which he was formulating. Monsalvat glanced through it and took himself off, honoring the officer with the slightest of bows.

Although the incident was trifling, it depressed Monsalvat. It made clear to him what he had become in this last year he had lived through. Standing in that room at Police Headquarters, observing the chief's attitude towards him, interpreting the mere fact of his being thus summoned, he saw clearly both what he had been, and what he had ceased being. Before, he had had position, money, a flattering reputation, friends. Now he had nothing; he was but a poor devil, at the mercy of the police. And all for what? What had he accomplished in a year? He had lifted three or

four women out of the gutter, taught a few men to read—but what did that signify in the infinite sea of human misery and ignorance? Monsalvat was strong in his convictions and in his moral health, strong with love of the good, strong in gentleness and pity; but now doubt was for the moment stronger than he, and he knew the all-permeating bitterness of temptation. In a moment of moral weakness he thought of giving up this hopeless task, of returning to his own world, and to his former station in it. A sadness, as vast as the universe, chilled his heart, and soul, and mind. He was wandering alone and forgotten in a ghastly wilderness; and this loneliness in the death-like, icy solitude of the world was too frightful to endure. He had sought out this life he was leading for the good of others; he had given what he had to others; he had devoted himself to his task, with joy and faith, with physical and moral courage; but now he broke down, for his whole life seemed a failure; he wept for that Monsalvat of whom he had hoped so much, not knowing that the strongest falter on their way and that such weaknesses are but a respite, a halt, giving renewed strength to go on with the day's march!

CHAPTER XIX

THAT same afternoon, while Monsalvat was wrestling with his doubts, Nacha was on the way to Belgrano to see Julieta.

Tormented by her anxieties, the slow progress of the street-car racked her nerves. She would never get there! And now it was stopping again! She looked angrily at the woman who dawdled cumbersomely in getting on or off. Didn't they care how long they took? Why were they so fat? Two or three men near her attempted to flirt, but Nacha's contemptuous eyes discouraged them. At the end of the first half hour she bought a newspaper, but when she tried to read it, she found that she did not understand a word. She made repeated efforts to fix her attention on the police news. At the end of two or three phrases, a line perhaps, her mind jumped to other things. Then she realized that she was not reading and began again, with the same result. At last she tossed the newspaper away.

The car had now reached streets where there was little traffic, and went more rapidly. At the end of an hour, it had arrived at Belgrano. Nacha got out and walked along silent avenues that were well shaded by fine trees. In her nervous haste she almost ran past pretty villas, with their flower-filled gardens, that spoke of peace and comfort. Over some of the streets the trees formed an arch and

the air was sweet with perfume. Only the footsteps of an occasional passer-by broke the silence of this suburb, apparently the home of calm and contentment. But Nacha could not yield to this atmosphere. Grief and terror drove her relentlessly on.

Julieta was working in Belgrano in a shop on Cabildo Street. Like Nacha, she earned very little; but her expenses were slight, for she was living with friends who accepted only a small sum in payment for her room and board. Before concluding arrangements with the husband and wife, people from her home town who had known her family, she told them the kind of life she had led up to that time. The wife hesitated a moment; but the husband, who was a militant Socialist, declared in a loud voice, with sweeping gestures and oratorical phrases, that there were no prejudices in his home, that he considered it a duty to contribute to the moral regeneration of anyone who needed it!

While Nacha waited for Julieta to come home, the Socialist and his wife chatted with her while their brood of children flocked around with staring eyes. The man's countless questions distracted her a little from her worries. But it required a great effort to attend to what he was saying. Every once in a while her expression grew blank, and her eyes opened wide as though she were in a paroxyism of fear.

When Julieta finally appeared, she took Nacha to her room.

"What is the trouble?" she exclaimed. "Something has happened! Come, tell me about it," and they sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I am running away!" Nacha said in a quivering voice.

"Running away! From whom?"

"I don't know. From Monsalvat, from Arnedo, from that awful man in the house there—from myself! I am afraid of myself, Julieta! If you knew what presentiments I have! Everything is black, and full of horror—and crimes—and . . . oh, I don't know what!"

"Presentiments?"

"Yes, something horrible is going to happen to me. Julieta listen! I have a presentiment that. . . ."

She could not go on, for her teeth chattered; her throat worked convulsively, and her eyes were starting from her head with terror. Julieta looked at her with gentle, sad eyes, and murmured affectionately to her, as to a child.

"No, no! I must tell you. You must know about it—this feeling I have almost drives me crazy! It makes me desperate!"

"But," said Julieta, "what is the matter?"

Nacha told her about Arnedo's renewed pursuit of her. He wanted to carry her off! And he was obstinate, and wild, and bad! And he always got what he wanted! And what could she do to stop him? He had such will power! And then . . . why did she feel this strange attraction towards him? She didn't love him. She hated him rather—he was so brutal with her! And yet, she never would have left him of her own accord; and now she was sure she would go away with him if he insisted very much. That was what terrified her.

To go away with Arnedo, after all her struggles to be decent! To make Monsalvat suffer so, when he was so good to her, and had given up everything for her sake! To go down again into that evil world from which he had rescued her!

"But Nacha, you must not lose courage! I thought you were quite safe. It was you who saved me! Why must you go back again, if you don't want to?"

"I have to! It's Fate! I always said I was destined to be a bad woman! Every time I tried to be good something happened to break up all my plans. Now it seems impossible for me to be decent. Everything is against me! Look at what happened to me in the store! Why should everything be so hard for me?"

"But why don't you tell him about it—Fernando, I mean? He worships you, and he'll make everything right. I am sure that he is more than a match for Arnedo. Why doesn't he have the man arrested? Or you can both leave the house!"

"But Julieta, you don't know what has happened! That awful man, Mauli, knows about me; and he told everyone in the building—that's why they're all after me, laughing at me and insulting me! The superintendent called me a name—that I deserved perhaps, once. . . . Oh, if you only knew! And they say Mauli is a police agent, a spy—Today, when I left the store, I saw him talking to Pampa! I couldn't move I was so scared—just stood there frozen on the sidewalk. They tried to get out of sight, but I could see they were on friendly terms. Who knows but that they are planning something,

Julieta! I have imagined so many awful things. I couldn't go home, that's why I came here. I want to get away from those men, from Monsalvat, from myself, from all the things I am afraid of! For something is sure to happen—today or tomorrow, or . . . sometime."

Julieta insisted that Nacha should tell Monsalvat everything.

"But how can I tell him that I am likely to go away with Pampa!"

"Don't you love Monsalvat, Nacha? I don't understand you! You used to adore him! Why, you talked of nothing else! And now. . . ."

"Now I love him more than I ever did. I know how fine he is, how good—whatever you want to call it! He wanted to marry me. . . ."

"And why didn't you let him, Nacha?"

"Just because I love him so much. He has lost everything on my account, position, money, friends —even his health! I can't let him go on like that. He ought to go back to his place in life, and leave me to my fate. A girl like me has no right to marry a man as good as he is and ruin him. He was generous towards me, and I want to be generous too. If he has sacrificed everything for me, and the sacrifice turns out to be of no avail, I ought to pay him back, make him give up leading a life that is so useless!"

"Useless, Nacha? Haven't we both a chance to be decent? Didn't he make you become the girl you are? What more could any one do?"

Nacha was silent. Then she came closer to Julieta and said, speaking very low:

"I'll be good, yes! But I shall never, never be happy. I am more unhappy now than I ever was. Bad luck follows me everywhere. I can't be meant for this kind of life! If I was, I ought not to be so uneasy all the time, I ought to feel contented at least! But I don't, I don't! And it grows worse every day!"

Julieta, however, was determined to convince her friend that she must talk things over with Monsalvat. Nacha consented finally to go back with her after supper, and discuss her fears with him.

Monsalvat meanwhile was anxiously awaiting Nacha's return. When, after reaching home from his visit to Police Headquarters, he discovered that she was not in, he became alarmed. A woman who lived next door told him that Nacha had probably gone out to find new quarters, as the superintendent had "ordered her out." Monsalvat at once went down to the *patio* in search of an explanation of this report.

It was already dark. The air in the courtyard was heavy with the smell of cooking. Mothers were crooning to their babies, and children were whimpering. From one of the windows came the strumming of a guitar; and in a corner of the courtyard two old men were gossiping in Genoese.

The superintendent had, until that moment, been quite servile in his attitude toward Monsalvat. But he knew now that this tenant of his had been called to account by the police, and he intended to use this bit of information. He began, however, by attracting an audience. He intensified his attitude of humility. As he bent his head before Monsalvat's

energetic accusations, he had all the appearance of being bullied by his lodger.

"Yes, sir. You can shout if you like, and insult me, and even strike me. I'm only a poor man, so what does it matter? But I have to carry out my orders. And the landlady, who is a fine woman, and highly respectable, doesn't want anyone in this house with dangerous ideas in their heads, nor any woman like that!"

Monsalvat lost all the serenity that still remained to him after the events of the day. He clenched his fists, ready to attack this man, at the first word of allusion to Nacha.

"So that's why, sir, I'm asking you to let us have your room. We are very sorry, of course; but it can't be helped! As to the young lady you're so friendly with, let me tell you—if my respectable tenants here present will excuse the word—we don't want any street-girls in this house!"

His hearers, now fairly numerous, burst into a loud guffaw. Monsalvat, exasperated beyond endurance, seized the man by the shoulder and said to him in a voice that shook with anger:

"You'll get what's coming to you, you hypocrite!"

But something made him glance around. Mauli was standing close to him, smiling his crooked smile. He stopped short. This evil-looking individual represented law and order, force and reason, organized society, of which he was one of the props! He was the enemy, hidden until that moment, but now revealed, his enemy, indeed, for Monsalvat felt himself to be the only champion there of the justice and goodness in human nature!

The superintendent made no move to defend himself from Monsalvat's threatened attack, but appeared to shrink, become more humble still. He smiled however, a treacherous and evil smile, and with lowered eyes, he murmured meekly:

"You ain't fair to me—but I don't need to defend myself! I'll trust to getting my reward in Heaven! No, I'm not going to fight this here gentleman, but I am going to ask the landlady to get him a pretty suit of striped clothes, and have his head shaved, and put him where he can have plenty of cold showers. . . ."

His audience greeted this allusion with explosions of mirth; and encouraged by his success, the superintendent continued:

"As to the young lady—excuse me, sir, the princess, I mean—as to the fair princess in room No. 22, I'll present her with. . . ."

Monsalvat had turned his back on the man, and was trying to force his way out of the crowd. But people, eager to prolong the scene as much as possible, got in his way.

"What? What will you present her with?" shrilled the women.

"I'll present her with—excuse the expression, ladies!—with a yellow ticket!"

Coarse, brutal laughter greeted this witticism and people gathered round the superintendent to make him repeat his part of the dialogue. As Monsalvat went slowly up the stairs it seemed to him that these people were all flaunting their heartless mirth in his face. He was incapable of seeing or hearing anything. His feeling for Nacha had, for

a moment, carried him away, spurred him to violence! But instantly, he had realized that if he did not curb it, it would be ruinous to himself, as well as to her. No, he could not risk leaving her alone, abandoned to herself, and to the cruelties she would be sure to experience.

After reaching his room, he began thinking of that humanity, whose foul words and coarse laughter were even then following him up the stairs. Now at last he saw how useless his ideals and his work were. What could he accomplish while men continued to be so full of evil? Yet whose fault was it? Whose but that of the men and women who allow the poor to wallow in poverty, ignorance, and the grossness which is perhaps but a protection necessary for self-preservation? No, the evil in these people was not inborn! It was acquired; it came from hunger, from disease, from the sense of being shut out from the banquet of life at which so many feast ! And little by little he began to think of those who were still laughing at him under his window as no more than unconscious victims; and he pitied them, he even forgave them!

There was a knock at the door, and Nacha appeared, accompanied by Julieta. Mauli, lounging about the front door, was the only person in the house who had seen them come in. As they passed, he turned aside, but no sooner were they on their way up the stairs than he ran to get the superintendent; and together they tiptoed to Monsalvat's door, where they stood with an ear to the panel, listening, and kneeling to look through the keyhole. What they saw was a girl sobbing, and a man look-

ing very wretched; but this of course failed to arouse any compassion in them. Finally when they saw that the girls were taking leave of their host, they scuttled away.

No sooner had Nacha and Julieta left him than Monsalvat went to the police station. He had no fears on Mauli's account; for, unpleasant as the man was, he was nevertheless in the employ of the department, and not likely therefore, Monsalvat thought, to take direct part in any plot of Arnedo's. So he had assured Nacha, quieting her fears a little. At the station they promised him to assign a special watchman to the house; and the latter returned with him, went up to Nacha's door, and told Monsalvat he would keep watch all night.

Monsalvat could not bring himself to believe that he had correctly heard the unbelievable things that Nacha was saying. How was it possible that Nacha should no longer love him, that she should be able to go away with Arnedo when, if what she declared was true, she hated the fellow! At certain moments he thought he must have dreamed the cruel words that rang in his ears: and that night as he lay in bed, Despair blew with icy breath upon his hands, and lips, creeping through his blood to his heart, and to his brain, threatening to wither forever the warm hope that was his life.

The next morning Nacha went to the store, and returned in an almost happy frame of mind. It had made her feel freer to tell Monsalvat how she felt towards him. Up to that moment it had seemed to her that she was deceiving him, and not treating him fairly. Now an enormous weight had been

lifted from her conscience. Also she knew that Monsalvat had understood. Her words had caused him keen suffering, but now he would return to his old world and forget her!

Monsalvat did not see her when she returned from work. He had gone directly from his office to see Torres. The doctor had just come in from his calls.

"I told you so," Torres asserted, after Monsalvat had related his conversation with Nacha. "No good can come of dealing with such women. You have got nothing out of it but disillusionment and bitterness: you've lost almost a year of your life—and that isn't all! Your reputation is quite done for, my boy. You'll have a job of it, to rehabilitate yourself socially!"

Monsalvat listened, wondering how this friend, the only one now left him, could know him so little. He had come to confide his trouble to the only human being of his own class who would consent to listen to him: and he had been misunderstood! It seemed useless to explain. Abruptly, without shaking hands with Torres, he went away, downcast and ill. Why hope for anything from anyone? Life weighed too heavy on him; he had no illusions, no hopes; and then it was that he knew what the frigid abysses of solitude are really like! Abysses into which everything falls away, and vanishes, and nothing, not even feeling remains. . . .

Not caring to go home he wandered about the streets. At dinner time he went into a coffee house and drank a little coffee. Then he continued his aimless walk for several hours, scarcely conscious

of what he was doing, or of the passing of time. At last he went back to his room and tried to read, but with no success. Finally he wrote Nacha a long letter, in which he tried to convince her that she loved him; strove to communicate his own feeling to her, painted the serene and happy days awaiting them if only Nacha would accept the love stretching out its imploring hands towards her!

An hour passed, two hours, three hours. Monsalvat wrote for a time, then broke off, then resumed writing. He would get up, pace to and fro, sit down again. It was now two o'clock. Everything was silent; the house, and the street outside.

But suddenly the silence was broken. He heard a noise like that of an automobile stopping near by. Then a door opened, and there was a subdued sound of footsteps in the courtyard. Monsalvat leaned out of his window, which opened on the street; but he could distinguish nothing. Then he went out to the narrow hallway which led to his room. From there he could not see the lower hall; so he went downstairs. There was no one to be seen in the *patio,* and everything was silent once more. Only in Mauli's room, almost directly facing Nacha's, was there a light. It must have been he coming home, Monsalvat concluded; and he returned to his room. Then he lay down, and quite exhausted, fell into a heavy sleep.

A few minutes later, however, a strange noise aroused him. He thought it must have been a scream; not a sharp cry, but muffled, stifled, as though coming from a distance. Then, as his brain cleared a little, he decided it had been from close

at hand—from the street, from the front door, perhaps. He heard men's voices, the noise of footsteps, and an automobile approaching. Jumping up from his bed, he leaned out from the window.

He must have uttered a frantic cry; for what he saw was as distinct and horrible and swift as the visions in a dream. . . . Four men came out from under the archway of the front door. They were carrying something, a dark huddled form that moved; and now they were thrusting it into the automobile drawn up at the curb. A woman!

CHAPTER XX

HE did not know what to do. At the police station they could give him no information concerning Nacha's whereabouts. It had been ascertained, from the testimony of three watchmen, that on the night of her disappearance an automobile was noticed about two o'clock in the morning, going full speed in a southerly direction. One of the watchmen declared he had seen a woman in the car, and that several men were holding her down. Another asserted that there was no woman in the automobile he had noticed. Torres, when Monsalvat consulted him about the matter, openly expressed his satisfaction. In his opinion the abduction was only simulated. He believed that Nacha had been a party to it, that she wished to leave Monsalvat, and had not known how to go about it.

"The probabilities are that she has gone off with Arnedo. Was it likely that this girl could continue long in the nunnery you condemned her to? Of course she wanted Pampa! Those fellows know how to keep the interest of women. When a girl falls in love with one of them she never gets over it. I know dozens of cases! It's as though they were bewitched. Well, now you're free! That scheme of yours really was ridiculous!"

Monsalvat looked at him hard. Torres was aware of his friend's reproach but did not desist

from his criticism. They stood facing one another in the doctor's consultation room. Torres in his long white apron looked even more like a Moor than usual, for the enveloping white brought out sharply the blackness of his eyes and crisply curling hair.

"Yes, ridiculous!" he repeated. "Do you think that such magnanimous acts suit these times? It's all right to want to rescue a girl from living as Nacha was doing—you may even go so far as to fall in love with her and want to marry her! That kind of thing happens every day. But the absurdity in all this is that a man with your gifts should devote himself to missionary work and go about among lost women with the idea that he is going to save them!"

Monsalvat did not care to hear more of this and went away.

Within a few days a letter reached him from Nacha. Its few short lines had evidently been written in haste. She had been locked up, she wrote, in a house of ill-fame in the *la Boca* section; and she added that she was not seeing Pampa. Monsalvat must not look for her! It was her destiny to be "bad," and she had to fulfill this destiny. She hoped he would be happy, and go back to his place in the world, to that carefree life from which, all unknowingly, she had drawn him away. Monsalvat remained a long time looking at this letter, reading it over and over, pausing at every word. If only between the lines, he might discover the address of the house where Nacha was being held—

Not yet defeated, he once more set out on a

search for her. He looked at the list of houses the doctor had given him to see if there were any house in la Boca mentioned there; but there was none. However, there were ten or twelve in the Barracas quarter. One afternoon, after leaving the Ministry he set out to visit one of these.

In a low section of the city, at the back of a two-storied house, in a dark corner of a street that led nowhere, he found the wretched house that was listed. At his knock at the door a toothless and unkempt old hag appeared. She was standing barefoot in the dirty water that she was swishing over the stone floor with an old broom. Monsalvat had never seen so lamentable a specimen of humanity. The bony old creature was scantily covered by a wrapper which, as it flapped open, revealed the appalling ugliness of her shrunken, discolored flesh and deformed body. When Monsalvat asked for the proprietor of the house, this human remnant showed her livid gums, and assured him she was the person in question. With a few apologies, she made him come in, and leaving him, went to put on more decent attire. Monsalvat found himself in a room permeated by a peculiar smell compounded of incense and smoke from the stove. It amused him to observe that the walls were papered with pictures of saints. In a corner, a candle was burning in front of St. Anthony. The chromos covered everything, even the head of the wooden bed, and the door.

The old woman returned somewhat tidier in appearance, and accompanied by a red-haired girl of about seventeen, poorly dressed, and very deaf.

Monsalvat thought she must be a servant in one of the wretched houses of the neighborhood. He informed the old woman of his purpose in coming, and she at once asked for money. He gave her ten *pesos* which she acknowledged by telling him that the day before a girl had told a story about a woman who had been stolen and locked up in a certain house in *la Boca.*

Where could he see the girl?

The old woman screamed into the red haired girl's ear inquiring who had told her this story. She mentioned a name.

"It's someone who just happened to be here—she isn't likely to come back. But I'll tell you where you can see her. Do you know the Basque woman's house? Well, they're going to have a party there tomorrow night, and the girl is sure to be there. Ask for Gertrude. She's a thin, dark piece . . . puts on lots of airs."

Monsalvat could not leave without calling the old woman to account for her trade, or at least for having such young girls about. The hag laughed shrilly, opening her toothless mouth wide, and rocking her body back and forth. Whenever she stopped a moment in her glee she wiped her nose on her arm.

"So you think we ruin girls, do you? That's a good one! Listen, tell me! How old do you think I am? Fifty-two—not a year more! Well, look, in all the twenty years I've been in this business I never deceived nor ruined any woman. A good one, that is! I don't force women to this kind of work. Criminal, you call it? Well, what about

the 'City of Paris' that pays its employees so little they have to get money somewhere else? What do you call that? Say, I know something about what's going on! I used to be up in the world once! You ought to have seen the folks who came to my house! Yes, a fine idea, you have! But I don't take advantage of anybody—Talk to me! Say, listen! Women don't ruin other women! It's you fine gentlemen that ruin them! That's a good one! Ha-ha! And if some woman helps to ruin another it's not us poor ones! That's a good one all right!"

The next evening Monsalvat set out for the Basque woman's house, where he was to inquire for "Gertrude." He went through dark sinister streets and at last came to what he thought must be the place. It was in a junction of two alleys, near the *Hospicio de la Merced.*

A desolate quarter of the town it was, depressing in lines and color. A short narrow street went upgrade between two high walls, then turned abruptly. From the direction in which Monsalvat was approaching, the walls and trees of the women's insane asylum alone were visible. All the rest was sky and night. Silence like that of the desert reigned, and a solitude fit for nameless crimes. Monsalvat shivered with a vague uneasiness. He turned at the end of the passage, and saw a multitude of distant lights. The view widened. Something ominous breathed in the thick darkness. On one side of the street stretched a low wall; and in the distance, beyond that, the wide inky railroad. The huge formless bulks of empty cars mingled in undistinguishable masses down there in those dreary

yards; and beyond, from the skyline of the city electric lights were glittering. Here and there yellow signals glowed in the blackness, and to the left stretched a line of dingy houses. The house Monsalvat was seeking must be one of these.

In a building in front of him a door was open. He could hear talking inside, laughter, the sound of a piano. He called out to announce his presence. Someone shouted to him to come in. From the other end of the entrance hall a girl, who was having some beer with her escort, called out to ask him what he wanted. Perhaps Monsalvat's appearance aroused mistrust in her companion. At any rate they replied that the lady of the house was busy and that a party was going on. Monsalvat however was persistent. Finally they let him pass into an inner room. The proprietress, a very tall and heavy Basque, whom he encountered in the *patio,* seemed to have her doubts about him too. Monsalvat made up some pretext for staying there a few moments, and in addition gave the woman money. The girl who was drinking beer turned out to be Gertrude. The proprietress called her aside so that Monsalvat could talk to her.

"How should I know?" exclaimed Gertrude. "I heard the story; but who knows if it's true? And what's more I don't remember anything about it. That was a good many days ago."

"It isn't so many days ago, because all this happened last week."

"I tell you I don't know anything about it. I wasn't the one who told the story in the first place. It was somebody else."

Monsalvat noticed that the youth who had been drinking beer with her was watching him. In the inner room a tango was going on. From the *patio* Monsalvat could see the profile of a tall mulatto who was playing the piano, in a very temperamental style, striking the piano case, whistling, breaking out into song. The air was heavy with odors and smoke, and the sensuousness of the dance floated out into the *patio* like the scent of an overripe fruit. Monsalvat was on the point of leaving, tired of his vain attempt to get information, when the girl suddenly changed her manner. Monsalvat thought he had noticed the youth making signs to her, but at the time attached no importance to this detail. Gertrude, now gracious and smiling, said that she would give him the address of the house the girl was supposed to be in; but begged him not to tell anyone she had done so, or they would kill her. At this point the youth drew near, and in greeting to Monsalvat, removed his cap. Gertrude mentioned a street and number, and explained to the youth what it was all about. The latter offered to accompany Monsalvat. He knew the house in question, and if the gentleman went alone, they would not let him in. The young fellow appeared good-natured, and Monsalvat concluded that he was probably a young workman. With his characteristic hopefulness where human nature was concerned he accepted the proffered company, and, after the youth had taken leave of three or four friends there, they started off together.

For a quarter of an hour they walked through dark streets entirely unknown to Monsalvat. Then

they came out on a wilderness of vacant lots. Suddenly, as they turned a corner, his guide gave a peculiar whistle so shrill that it pierced the darkness like a knife. Before Monsalvat could ask what this meant he saw four toughs descending on him with pointing revolvers. Obviously this was no time for talk, nor for complaint. Resignedly he handed over all the money he had with him.

He was not disheartened, however, nor was he angry with the thieves. He told himself that the poor devils no doubt needed the money, and thought no more of the incident. Following, as he believed, the same road he had come by, he reached the river, and at sight of it, felt that he had returned again to civilized regions. After inquiring his road, he started off on foot, for he had no other way of covering the long distance separating him from *la Boca.*

As he went along he pondered his situation; and doubt tormented him. Failure appeared constantly in his path. For the hundredth time he went over the confession Nacha had made to him in Julieta's presence on the eve of her abduction. How could she possibly fear being attracted by Arnedo, brutal and tyrannous as he was? How, after several months of an honest and decent life, could it be so easy for her to go back to a vicious world? Yet that was what her return to Arnedo meant. What unfathomable depths, what mysteries there are in human hearts! He could not believe that Nacha had ceased to love him. She loved him, not only, as she supposed, as a daughter loves her father, or as a sister her brother, or a believer God: she loved

him with her whole being. But Nacha must have had her moments of doubt too, and it was then that the memory of her life with Pampa, its violences and its caresses, must have pursued her as Pampa himself was doing; and her very honesty with herself would in such a case make her feel ashamed, and confirm her fears that she was destined to an evil life.

He was following the river bank where old boats lay sleeping. A sailor's chanty disturbed the silence. Taverns, bearing exotic names that recalled all the countries of the earth, lined the other side of the street, and within, grimy men were drinking. Monsalvat thought of his earlier years, of his travels, of his sojourns in Italy, of the women who had loved him, of his carefree and happy life. And there he was, on his way back from a house of ill-fame, fresh from the society of a thief, trudging along in this wretched district, in search of a lost woman! And he felt an immense pity for himself. . . .

He asked a passerby to direct him to the address Gertrude had given him. It was not far from there. With a good-bye to the river, which had summoned before him some of his happiest memories, saddening him withal, he set out for his destination.

Now he was passing through a street which had on one side a high wall, possibly that of a cathedral, or a convent, or perhaps merely that of a factory, a black railing topping it; and now he was going down another street lined with taverns, and Scandinavian lodging-houses. Monsalvat looked in through some of the open doorways, his eye at-

tracted by foreign wall decorations. In one of these lodging places, the proprietor and his family were entertaining the boarders. A small house, its balconies full of potted flowers, rubbed shoulders with a tightly closed hovel in front of which was a street lamp bearing the legend "Fram." In another of these taverns an old street-walker, wearing an extraordinary assortment of garments, and ironically enough preserving, even in her present decay, something of the unusual, even noble beauty she had once possessed, was amusing, with her drunken antics, four tall, fair-haired and silent men who were evidently sailors. Monsalvat passed on through another street, shaded by a few trees; and the taverns here, with their walls of one color, vivid blues, or greens, suggested the decorations of Russian ballets. Finally, among the shanties built on piles, because of flood tides, and constructed of the cheapest sort of wood, with tin roofs, he found the address Gertrude had mentioned; for it was not fictitious. Pushing open the door, he went in. No, Nacha could not possibly be here. No one could be capable of holding a woman prisoner in such a place. Only the off-scourings of the human race could frequent such a den as this! The *patio,* of large proportions, opening into low-ceilinged rooms, was roofed over. About fifty individuals, dirty and ill-smelling, sat, or stood about, in groups. There were even some negroes there, clearly North Americans. No one was talking. Three or four women, dressed in screaming red, were running about from one group to another. . . . No! Nacha was not

there! And Monsalvat went away convinced that he had been the victim of a brutal joke.

The following day, desperately anxious to find Nacha, and save her from the fatal surroundings into which she had probably fallen, he returned to the house near the *Hospicio de la Merced.* By dint of money he succeeded in interviewing Gertrude alone. The girl, with admirable levity, laughed at the trick she had played him. Then she tried to put the blame on the youth who had led Monsalvat into the ambush.

"And how is it you are living with a thief?" Monsalvat inquired.

"Oh, I don't pry into other people's business!"

"But you know that he assaults people and robs them?"

"Well, what of it? And what's that to you?"

After a long discussion and the promise of more money if it proved that she had not deceived him again, Monsalvat obtained the address he wanted. It was that of a house of good appearance between Lezama Park and la Boca; and it cost him a considerable sum to get into it. At his request the proprietress introduced all the girls who were there at the moment. But Nacha was not among them. One girl, however, turned out to have been a member of the group who had been with Nacha in the cabaret on the night he came to her defence. Monsalvat took her aside. She was a fat, stupid-looking creature, sniffling constantly.

"I saw you that night, you remember? And I wanted to know you. What luck to meet you at last, old fellow!"

This was very friendly treatment from a person he had never spoken to before. Monsalvat explained the object of his visit. The girl looked disappointed, but gave him what information she had.

"I don't know anything, you understand! But I heard talk about something going on. One night they brought a girl here, and kept her two days—but I was away all that time. Then they took her somewhere else. And you say it was Nacha? Who would have thought it! And she was always so stuck-up—to think of what's happened to her now!"

Monsalvat asked her to explain what she meant.

"Why they say that she was taken to one of those houses—oh, the very worst! Somewhere in Olivarria Street, or Necochea—I'm not sure which. If you want to find her, go to those houses and inquire."

Monsalvat started out again. Twice he had gone down into this hell; he had never thought he would have to descend to the very lowest circles of the abyss. But for Nacha's sake he went even into those ghastly caverns where lie the unhappy beings who have lost not only their bodies, but their minds and their souls too. And as he wandered among the shades there—they could not be called living beings—Monsalvat wondered how this last of all crimes could be allowed in a world that also contains beauty and kindness; for these women had been degraded from the human estate to that of beasts. And other human beings had allowed this to happen; and still other human beings had caused it. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

THE quest through *la Boca* proved vain. No one would give him any information. But he was sent hither and yon, serving now as a joke and now as a prey to robbers. He was always assured that such and such an individual could no doubt tell him what he wanted to know, and Monsalvat would run this clue down, from café to café, from tavern to tavern. In this fashion he traversed the entire district of *la Boca,* that sinister "Tenderloin" of Buenos Aires. He went to gaming houses, lupanars, saloons. He entered cheap hotels and lodging houses.

Here English or German phrases fell on his ear; there he heard Norwegian, Russian, or Finnish. In another quarter he found a medley of Balkan tongues, and in yet another he recognized the barbarous Arab dialects of Northern Africa. One day he found himself at a Korean bar; on another in a Chinese eating house. Once he made his way into a gathering of Turks. In the course of one month he encountered all kinds of people. A motley throng of gamblers, down-and-outs, and criminals passed before him: yet all was useless. He learned nothing of Nacha.

He went back one afternoon to the house where she had been kept a few days, and wondered why

he had not thought of doing so before. Instead, however, of questioning the girls, he interviewed the proprietress in person, and offered to give her a thousand *pesos* if she could provide him with reliable information concerning Nacha's whereabouts. The woman was an old creature full of cunning and lies, hard to understand because of her mumbling and her odd use of words. She was smoking stubby cigars which she made herself, from Paraguay tobacco. But the sum this caller offered for a little information made her open her wrinkled eyelids wide. She began to tell him all she knew.

It so happened also that she detested Pampa. He had treated her badly on various occasions, using her for the accomplishment of his crimes, and then failing to pay for her services. With the help of his *patota,* and Mauli, he had brought Nacha to her house where she was kept locked up like a prisoner. She would not allow any man to come near her, however, screaming, scratching and biting like a fury. Finally Arnedo, revolver in hand, made her write to Monsalvat, thinking to tame her in that way and show her how useless any resistance was.

"How did she receive Arnedo's attentions?" Monsalvat asked.

"You ought to have seen her!" the old woman replied, drawing at her cigar butt. "She called him names, just the way she did me, and everyone else she could think of. What words she used! And he didn't run after her much either! I guess he brought her here to get even with someone. With whom? How should I know, son?"

"And you don't know where Nacha is?"

"Yes. She's. . . ."

She moved her cigar stump to the other side of her mouth.

"See here, young man, if you put down fifty *pesos* of that thousand now, I'll give you a pretty little piece of information. True as I'm telling you! This old body wouldn't lie! I was raised to speak the truth, and I'll die doing the same!"

Monsalvat handed her the sum she asked, and the old creature gave him two bits of advice. He was to talk to a certain Amiral, a poor wretch who was a friend of Arnedo's, and who, for money, would get the truth out of Pampa. However, the other, and the better course to follow, in her opinion, was to see a washerwoman named Braulia, who knew all the vicious resorts of the district for she kept them "stocked" with girls.

Braulia proved to be a negress, who lived in a shanty, at the back of a vacant lot. After much chattering she told him that she would answer his question the following night, when he was to meet her at a certain café, on the river bank. Fearing a decoy, for he had learned to be mistrustful, he asked her why he could not wait on the street corner, or in some café he knew. The negress replied that he would have to go where she told him, and if that didn't suit him he could go without what he was looking for.

The next evening he went to the café designated. His entrance there appeared not to attract attention. As a matter of fact its patrons had instantly spotted him, but they pretended not to notice his presence.

The place was a foul den, much like a cave, so low was its roof. The chairs, benches and tables were greasy and ill-smelling. A mulatto in his shirt-sleeves was waiting on the customers. Three North American negroes, so drunk they could not stand, were singing something with a cakewalk rhythm. Opening their mouths wide, they stretched their thick lips from ear to ear, showing their red gums and gleaming white teeth. One of them was playing a large accordeon. From the table where Monsalvat was sitting he could see the port light of a boat, and above, the starry sky. Every few minutes a drunken man staggered up the street.

While he was waiting for some message from the negress, a man came up to him, and, telling him he belonged to the secret police, advised him to leave. "This is no place for you," he said. "Whoever it was told you to come here is just planning to rob you." Monsalvat left the place, and never returned to it.

He decided to see Amiral; but this turned out to be more easily planned than done. Amiral apparently never ate at home and rarely slept there; and it was of course useless to write to him since he was quite likely to show the communication to Arnedo. So, while trying to find the elusive Amiral, Monsalvat continued his seeking of Nacha. He was beginning now to absent himself from his office for entire afternoons. List in hand, he went about stirring up all the back waters of this dismal slough of despond.

"She is not here. We don't know her," they would tell him.

Then he would go to another house, and another, and yet another. He would explain his object, argue with the unfriendly "Madames," give countless details about Nacha. At times he begged for help; but at others, he would become enraged and insult the woman who told him "She is not here." Exasperated, maddened, he would rush out and stumble into the first taxi that passed, giving addresses of yet other houses. For he could think of nothing but this purpose. He came to the point of believing that everyone was in league to outwit him. But he would succeed yet! He had one irresistible ally: the will to find her!

"She is not here. We don't know her."

"What? Not here either?" Then the earth must have swallowed her! They all knew nothing about her, these people? That was a lie! They wanted to lead him on, exploit him, as they had done countless times. There was nothing but lies and hypocrisy and evil in these women. And he had defended them, ruined himself for them! Ah, Nacha! Nacha! What had her unhappy destiny brought her to? She asked him not to look for her, since she was destined to a bad life! But all the more would he persist, with all the more eagerness, all the more desperation! He would seek her, not for love, but to save her from those stagnant waters on whose brim ill-fated women and girls lurched and staggered, dizzy with the poisonous gases of that loathsome morass!

"She is not here. We don't know her."

Every word fell on him like a whip-lash. He would come out of these accursed houses, sick, in

physical pain; and he could not grow used to disappointments. At first his heart had been high with hope. But now his step was beginning to falter, and a strange expression had come over his face. His eyes glanced nervously about at people and objects in the room, or stared at the woman he was questioning. He knew that she too would say, "She is not here." Yet he went on to the next house and to the next, repeating his frantic question. Then, almost invariably, without a word more he would rush out; though once, to the stupefaction of the women, he uttered an exclamation of anguish, and staggered to a chair.

"She is not here. We don't know her," was the unvarying reply.

At the thought that she might be dead his throat tightened and closed, while the rest of his body felt the oppression as of a great weight of earth upon it. Nacha dead! What was he to do in a world without Nacha? Should he return to the place he had formerly occupied in life? Or consecrate himself to those other wretches of the underworld? But then Nacha could not have died without his feeling it, without his knowing it! No, Nacha could not be dead! She was alive! She loved him! She was waiting for him!

"She is not here. We don't know her."

Well, didn't he know that Nacha wasn't there? Nacha loved him, and was expecting him, somewhere. That much was sure! If he had come to this particular house to inquire it was merely to be thorough. The people there could all go to the devil for all he cared! He wasn't going to ask

any favors of them! Nacha was waiting for him. . . . What did the rest of the world matter . . . society, or its victims, or the cabaret, or the workmen murdered in the Square, or his mother's death, or his sister's! Nacha was expecting him! His heart, where a sweet, incessant song was singing, leapt, mad with joy, like the throbbing breast of a bird! Nacha was expecting him. . . .

But where?

Meanwhile Monsalvat was not altogether unmindful of himself. He noticed that at times his mind became blank, and that at such moments he would turn deathly pale, and be unable to walk. Then again he suffered from pains at the base of his brain, as if a wedge had been hammered into his skull at that point. He wondered if this presaged mental derangement. Was he going mad? He ate next to nothing, and slept little. Worried about his condition, he spent a week in bed.

One afternoon a letter came from the Ministry. It contained his dismissal. Monsalvat read the document, smiling. With it was a letter from the under-secretary who expressed his chief's regrets at being forced to take such action; but Monsalvat's frequent absences from the office, his lack of attention to his work, which, of course, might result in serious consequences, left the Minister no choice in the matter.

Monsalvat tossed both communications to the floor. "What does such nonsense matter to me? Nacha is waiting for me!"

The "nonsense," nevertheless, had serious implications. November was upon him and he had paid

only a third of the interest on the mortgage. The Bank was insisting on payment, but he had no idea where to get the three thousand *pesos* needed. Moreover he was constantly giving away more than he could possibly afford, and naïvely letting himself be robbed on every hand. He had borrowed at high rates and had never paid any of the accumulating interest. The Bank, however, came to his rescue by selling the tenement, obtaining scarcely sixty thousand at the auction, which occurred on an oppressive November day. Very few bidders appeared; for it was just the beginning of that financial crisis which was to come to a head some fifteen months later, in 1913. Property values were going down. Money stringency was acute. No one was risking investment in real estate except at a bargain. The Bank recovered its forty thousand *pesos* with the interest. Monsalvat paid his minor borrowings and in the end found himself possessed of some ten thousand *pesos*. He now felt quite at ease. On that sum he could live two years in case he found no work. But it was written that bad luck was to pursue him. The bank in which he deposited his money failed within three months!

He met Amiral one morning, and, without preamble, told him that he wanted him to find out from Arnedo, as skillfully as possible, where Nacha was. Amiral, at mention of this name, smiled understandingly. He stroked his long brown mustache, and stretching out his thin arms, he exclaimed:

"Just what I always said! Of course a man like you who has lived in Paris—why, when they told

me you were trying to reform our girls over here, I wouldn't believe them, for I felt sure you knew better. . . . Well, I'm glad to see I was right!"

Monsalvat wanted to knock the fellow down but contained himself. Amiral, thoroughly pleased with his penetration, added, in a confidential tone:

"It was clever of you to think of this disguise; because here in Buenos Aires, alas! there is no atmosphere. . . . One has to provide it . . . ha! ha! . . . provide it!"

Monsalvat wasted no time trying to correct Amiral's interpretation of his conduct, but with brutal directness offered him a thousand *pesos* to find out where Nacha was. Amiral staggered back dramatically. He thought that it perhaps became him to be angry; but, having consulted his conscience, he decided to accept. There was no need of being offended for so small a sum! Had it been fifty or a hundred thousand. . . !

Several days passed. Monsalvat was frightened by a rapid change for the worse in his nervous condition. One afternoon as he was drinking some coffee in a pastry shop near the business centre of the town, the mental blankness he knew and dreaded came upon him. His hands trembled, and he broke into a cold sweat. A waiter helped him into a cab. When he reached his room he found he could neither read nor write. His mind seemed scattered, broken into bits. All his strength was gone. From day to day his organism seemed to lose coordination, as if all the parts of his being had escaped the control of his will. Different men seemed to manifest themselves within him; as he wonderingly ob-

served them, he found the acts and thoughts of these other Monsalvats quite inexplicable.

Finally, one December morning, Amiral told him that Arnedo knew nothing about Nacha. After keeping her several days locked up in a certain house, he had taken her to another, from which, after a week or two, she had run away.

Monsalvat believed her lost forever. At the same time he was astonished at the slight impression Amiral's words seemed to make on him. He stood motionless for a long time gazing blankly into the distance, but he felt so ill that he yielded to a desire to go to some friend. He called on de Castro, preferring not to see Torres, who might think him either sick or insane. Ruiz was profoundly distressed at sight of him. Monsalvat noticed his friend's pitying expression and stammered some incoherent words. Then he collapsed.

A deep, painful night had settled on him, body and soul, nor could his mind see in that sudden darkness. His whole being had become insensible. For him now there was no longer either Nacha or Monsalvat; nor struggling nor rest; for him there was neither truth or beauty; the world had been blotted out.

CHAPTER XXII

THE storm had passed. Calm had returned to the world.

Monsalvat was living in a sanatorium at Almagro, to which his friends had taken him. Tranquil and silent, he spent nearly the entire day in the small park, with its lofty eucalyptus groves, thinking of nothing, trying not to think. He was new-born. What did the past matter? He was going to look ahead! Life lay before, not behind, him! Even Nacha no longer existed; or rather, had ceased to exist for him! With her, a whole universe—all that he knew and loved, all that his feelings and thought had created in him—had vanished from his heart and mind. Not that he denied the reality of the past year; but, the storm weathered, he found himself looking at a new world, and he could not live in its presence with the same opinions and feelings as before.

Peace had come to him; but he lacked something that he loved even more than peace: freedom; and now that he felt sane and sound, he wanted to escape from his present surroundings. Moreover, two inoffensive maniacs had recently come to the sanatorium. Their presence annoyed Monsalvat, for he could not see that they differed very much from himself. At times he wondered if his attempts to

reform the world might not become a mania also, and bring him down to the level of these harmless lunatics.

His friends came but rarely to see him, for the sanatorium was a little distance out of town. Their consciences were clear since they were paying Monsalvat's expenses.

One afternoon, however, after Monsalvat's complete recovery, Ruiz de Castro and Torres called on him. They sat in the garden, talking and for the first time since his illness, touched on the forbidden subject. Monsalvat had perhaps led them on, by confiding to them his curious sensation of having just come to life, as fresh and new as a newborn baby. With a view to determining his friend's actual state of mind, Torres observed:

"So you see how useless all those efforts of yours really are. . . ."

"Not at all," Monsalvat declared. "It is never useless to try to help people."

"Granted that you help others," de Castro broke in, "just the same, you did yourself a lot of harm!"

"You are quite mistaken. I have done myself a great deal of good—so much good that today I am not the discontented, dejected man I was a year ago. I don't know what I shall do tomorrow; but I know that if I am really a different man, I shall owe the transformation to my idealistic view of life."

"So you're going right on with that fool business!" Torres exclaimed. "I fail to see the new man in you. On the contrary, I should say your trouble is that life doesn't teach you anything. After a year

of failure—failure in every sense of the word—you are still planning to reform the world, and all by yourself!"

Monsalvat was silent a moment. Then he answered calmly:

"It is life—not my failures, because I didn't fail—that has taught me how powerless individual effort is. I believe now that not only would I fail to reform the world, but also that a million men setting about it each on his own hook, as I did, would fail too."

"Well, at last!" exclaimed Ruiz de Castro. "It's about time you became convinced that the world can't be changed."

"I didn't say that. On the contrary I consider it more capable of reform now than ever it was. But I also know that a program is necessary, and a method, and training! I know now that the idealism of one individual, the action of one man, does not help much to bring about ultimate success. But I do not go back on individual ideals, individual accomplishment; because it is the individual who provides the impulse, the forward push, the motive power, if you like, without which nothing can move. The only trouble is that all these energies are isolated, uncoordinated. . . . However, you see my point: before you can have action to accomplish a purpose, you must have a vision of what the purpose is. The ideal precedes and accompanies the accomplishment of reform—that you understand! The world must be reformed, must be built up again rather, from its foundations. We must go about such a matter slowly—but not too slowly—and so,

little by little. . . ! But every so often the idealist, the dreamer, the madman and the fool, all those who fight the great battle with their hearts, must give a vigorous thrust forward!"

His two friends looked at one another. . . . A hopeless case!

"But why so many reforms in the world? Just so that you can marry a prostitute?" Torres brutally rejoined.

Monsalvat did not reply; and the doctor, ashamed of his outbreak, tried to make up for it by a show of affection. Monsalvat sat beside him on a bench; and as Torres went on to trivial matters, he patted his patient on the shoulder now and then.

After a while they went away, none too well pleased. Monsalvat saw plainly that everything about him—his opinions, his recent life, his feelings —were compromising these friends of his. They were kindly and relatively generous fellows, but he knew that they were weak in the presence of social pressure. However much they might care for him, if they should have to choose between him and society, they would without question side with the latter.

The moment this became clear to him, he thought of nothing but of making his escape. He did not want his friends to know where he was going. If he was compromising them he would spare them the trouble and the annoyance of having to desert him. He would desert them. He would rather appear ungrateful than accept the unpleasant situation which is bound to arise when people want to cut a friendship short, and have not the courage

to do it. Monsalvat wished to be free also; free, not economically,—for he could earn a living somehow—but free from those friends who constituted the only bond still tying him to society.

One day he fled from the sanatorium. As he possessed only the clothes he was wearing and his pockets were empty, he walked from Almagro to the capital. It was dawn when he started out. The limpid sky deepened into a blue which still showed a few stars. In the streets the shadows were slowly drawing back into such retreats as the trees offered, hanging veil-like about their trunks and branches, and in the distance, out towards the harbor, a delicate rose light had risen to view. What an extraordinary sensation, this first contact with living things, after months of isolation! How innocent life seemed, and young! Oh, surely, the world was new, it had been born again!

Passing along the solitary streets, he lived in his dream, feeling neither cold nor fatigue. Everything had been made over. The sky was clearer than before, objects had an unknown beauty, men were living in harmony.

Then it occurred to him that so it must always seem to one who wanders alone under a sky, and amid colors that offer love to a world awakening to the day; and then he remembered that of all men, only the humble of the earth see this dawn-light, and carry something of its tenderness in their hearts. Was it this, perhaps, which kept them from noticing the approach of another dawn, already sending its heralds across the sky?

He had left the tree-bordered avenues now. The

city was awakening. Poor folk, laborers for the most part, passed him now at every step. House doors were opening. The deep blue of the sky had given place to a luminous clarity, and the world was rosy for a moment, enveloped in a shining softness. Then the sun rose, and morning filled with sounds and lights, joys and sorrows. Life! Monsalvat took a deep breath; for it seemed that with this air he breathed in freedom too. He felt that he was sound and good.

But suddenly fatigue overtook him. He tried to distance it, but in vain. It hung on his legs, weighting down his body, making it hard for him to walk. When he reached the Plaza del Once he sat down on a bench, and rested there for an hour, dozing a little. Then he began to consider his situation. Where should he go? First of all he must find lodgings. In a miserable hotel on the Plaza, they refused to give him a room because he had no luggage; and he met with the same refusal in other cheap inns. So the morning passed. Finally he bethought him of a Spaniard whose wife kept a boarding-house on the Plaza Lavalle, and for whom he had once done a favor; so he set out for this address.

It was already past noon and he began to feel the pangs of hunger. He tried to pass quickly by the Court buildings in the Plaza Lavalle, anxious to escape the notice of his former colleagues. But suddenly, as he was crossing the street, he saw in front of him a shabbily dressed individual who was bowing to him with exaggerated servility. It was none other than Moreno, still haunting the courts

in quest of copying to do, or errands to run. Monsalvat inquired after his wife and Irene.

"Oh, Doctor, misfortune has taken possession of my hearth and home! Irene—but why speak of past troubles? Some other time, Doctor, I'll tell you this melancholy story. Now we are struggling, with a little success, I may say, against the cruel persecutions of the Fates. My wife has a position as janitress in a tenement house. It's a little distance out, over Barracas way, near the bridge. But we manage to keep alive."

As he went on talking it occurred to Monsalvat that he had found a solution for his problem. He asked Moreno if there were any unoccupied rooms in the house he spoke of.

"Yes, Doctor, there are. But why this question?"

"Because I wish to take one of them at once."

Moreno stood open-mouthed with astonishment. Then he protested in a welter of words. He could never permit Doctor Monsalvat, that light of the Law, to live in the wretched hovel which he inhabited. Monsalvat, however, insisted that that was his affair. Moreno concluded that Monsalvat had chosen that section of the city to carry out some kind of philanthropical scheme, and consented to take him home. Besides, he was sure to profit eventually by Monsalvat's presence in the same house! A *peso* here and there, for a quiet little session in a saloon now and then, to say nothing of the pretexts he could find for borrowing—urgent creditors, need of clothing, food, and so on!

Moreno was giving his address when some words of Monsalvat's thrust him into unfathomable depths

of bewilderment. The doctor was actually asking him for carfare! Moreno stood transfixed, his arms outspread, a look of terror on his sallow face.

"You're surely joking, Doctor!" he exclaimed, incredulous. "Can it be that Moreno, poor pariah that he is, Moreño, stepson of Providence, should be asked to lend a—a nickel—to the learned and illustrious Doctor Fernando Monsalvat?"

He looked at his admired protector and saw that now, at least, the man was not to be envied. He was on the point of taking back what he had said about a room to let in his tenement house. Finally, in a burst of generosity, he took a dime from his pocket and gave it to Monsalvat. As the latter walked away, Moreno stood a full quarter of an hour, his arms crossed on his chest, meditating and philosophizing on the vicissitudes of human destiny.

Monsalvat took up his abode in the tenement. He wrote to his father's wife, suggesting a cash compromise for the rights to his father's property that he might claim from the surmised existence of an early will, rights that Ruiz de Castro had always urged him to assert. As long as he had enough to live on, he had seen no reason why he should claim any of the Monsalvat property. His letter was modest in its tone, intimating that only a distressing financial situation could have persuaded him to bring up the question of his father's testamentary provisions. Moreno delivered the letter.

His father's wife had never been kindly disposed toward him, had in fact injured him in every way she could. Determined that her daughters should know nothing of their father's illegitimate family,

she had never permitted him even to meet his half-sisters. They had been led to believe that Fernando Monsalvat was a distant relative. The letter itself remained unanswered; but its recipient sent back a fifty *peso* bill. Money meant nothing to Monsalvat and, always slow to perceive bad intentions in others, he did not catch the offensive tone of the reply. On the contrary, he acknowledged the remittance in cordial fashion, and felt quite happy about having received it. He purchased a few articles of clothing, paid his rent, and rewarded Moreno for his services. During the next month he lived on the good will of Moreno's wife, who let him stay on without paying, telling the landlord that the room occupied by her protégé was without a tenant. She also saw to it that he had something to eat, giving him whatever was left over from her own table; and that was little enough.

Meanwhile he wrote articles and sent them out to newspapers and periodicals. He was convinced that he now had something to say, and decided henceforth to give his energies to writing. One review accepted an article, sending him thirty *pesos,* which he at once handed over to his protectress.

Two months passed, two strange months during which he lived indoors, entirely shut up within himself, far from everyone and everything. Often he spent the day in bed, talking only to Moreno, who frequently came to provide him with conversation. More than once the man recalled Irene's tragic story; but Monsalvat listened to it with interest every time, stirred by the curious spectacle of this father, who in telling of his daughter's sufferings,

lost something of his absurdity; and not unmindful of the part he himself had played in the girl's unhappy life.

According to Moreno, Irene had fallen in love with someone who could not share her passion; as a result she had for several weeks been crazed with grief. At the slightest provocation she would fly into a rage, threaten her mother, insult Moreno, attack the children. Then a suitor presented himself, a young man who worked in a barber-shop near by. He was an ugly, dark-skinned, almost grotesque fellow; but Irene accepted him, no one knew why, for plainly she cared nothing for him. However, someone in the neighborhood told her that her betrothed had a mistress. As a matter of fact he had put an end to these relations; but Irene, humiliated, hurt and angered by the deception, went out of her head, called a man in from the street, told him what had happened, and offered herself to him. Her suitor heard gossip of the incident, rushed to Irene's room, and tried to shoot her. He missed his aim, was arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Then Irene ran away. All that Moreno could discover about her after that was that every week she visited the fellow at the prison. How she made a living, he did not know.

"She's lost, doctor, lost!" Moreno would sob. "The flower of the family! So good, and such a worker—as pretty as they make them! And to think that I am the guilty one, I, most contemptible of drunkards! There you see the consequences of vice—for my poor little girl is the child of alcohol! That's why she turned out as she did—my fault!"

And he covered his unwashed face with his two hands, and occupied Monsalvat's only chair while the latter dressed.

One day Monsalvat decided to go out. He had just put on a summer overcoat—directly over his shirt, for his jacket and waistcoat he had pawned—when Moreno's wife came in to announce some ladies who were asking to see him. He looked sternly at the woman. He was sure she had reported the sad case of "the poor fellow starving on the top floor" to some charitable society! He went out to the *patio* resolved to pay no attention to the ladies.

Noisy outcries were coming from one of the rooms—a woman's voice cursing these charity visitors who had refused her any help, because she had a child and wasn't married, and screaming denunciations of charity organizations in general and of the poor wretches who toadied to these fine ladies so as to get money out of them. The visitors seemed neither angered nor intimidated. Evidently they were accustomed to such scenes.

"Is what that woman says true?" asked Monsalvat.

"Why I know you!" exclaimed the other—the plump lady who, at a dinner at Ruiz de Castro's, had been so oratorical in her defense of the established order.

Monsalvat shook hands coldly with both ladies. They tried to conceal the surprise and pain his obviously distressful circumstances caused them.

"Is what that woman says true?" Monsalvat inquired again.

"Yes, Monsalvat, but—"

He paid no attention to Isabel's excuses.

"Then this woman is quite right. You have no charity in you. You are doing this kind of thing for selfish motives, and nothing else—just to occupy your time, fill conspicuous positions in charity organizations!"

Launched on this theme, he drove harshly, savagely ahead, as though executing judgment. Wrapped in his overcoat which was too loose for him, now and then moving his shoulders in a gesture of scorn, his eyes wide open, and seemingly larger so emaciated was his face, he presented an extraordinary spectacle as he denounced these stylish, distinguished, perfumed ladies, so out of place in that dreary courtyard of the slums. They listened to him without a word. Isabel, indeed, unnoticed by Monsalvat, softly stole from the group and went up to the woman whose outcries had started the scene, giving her all the money she had in her purse. Nor did Monsalvat observe that when she returned she removed a glove and took a ring from her finger. Suddenly, and quite humbly she said:

"Here, Monsalvat, take this, please sell it; and give the money to this woman."

Monsalvat took the ring.

"And if you—"

She looked at him fearful of offending: he was shaking his head. Drawing him aside, she began to talk with him more in confidence.

"You need to, Monsalvat! Please accept part of the ring's value! We all have to live. Don't

think us so bad—When I spoke as I did that night, you remember, it was because I knew nothing about life—I too have suffered since then, and now I understand many things. . . ."

Though Monsalvat was unyielding on this point, he shook hands with his callers in far more friendly fashion, and left the building accompanied by Moreno, who could not get over his amazement at what was going on before his eyes. He did not lose much time before offering, unsuccessfully, to sell the ring himself. Monsalvat saw that as a matter of fact these two women like many others of their class were not thoroughly bad as he had believed. If they appeared to disadvantage it was because of the atmosphere of gross selfishness in which they had been brought up, in which they had lived all their lives. The bad in them was not an individual thing inherent in their characters, but the result of prevailing ideas, the collective product of a self-satisfied and unintelligent, rather than unfeeling, society.

They took a street car going towards the business section of the city. Monsalvat was glad of Moreno's company; for a sudden fit of weakness had come over him. He had scarcely been able to walk the three blocks to the car line, so unsteady were his legs under him. In the tram he felt quite nauseated. Houses and sidewalks were being pushed by some mysterious force out of their true plane, and were rising, sinking, retreating. The car was crowded. Moreno moved forward to find a seat, leaving Monsalvat sitting in the rear of the tram.

They were passing through Piedras Street. At

the corner of Mejico, the man beside him rose to give his place to a woman. Monsalvat did not look at her, merely noticing that she was in mourning. In a few moments, however, he felt that she was looking at him. An acquaintance perhaps who had recognized him! And he grew uneasily conscious of his bedraggled appearance. Then he reflected that with his week's growth of beard and his threadbare coat, his startling emaciation, his whole air of weakness and sickness, he must be quite secure. No one would know him. The thought consoled him, but he turned carelessly towards the window, so as to hide his face.

Suddenly he heard a soft voice murmuring his name. He turned pale, and his hands began to tremble. A whole row of houses plunged several yards into the ground, changing color as they sank. The car seemed to lurch to one side threatening to fall over on itself.

"It's so long since we have seen one another," the voice was saying. "My mother died, and I am living in Tacuari Street, in our boarding-house. I have been there some time. My sister runs the house—and I—"

Monsalvat had regained a more normal state of consciousness, but he said nothing. He could not speak. Nacha's voice was like a music infinitely sweet, echoing in his ears as in a delicious dream, something vague and hazy like a memory from a past beyond any but the vaguest sort of remembering. . . .

Finally he looked into her eyes.

In his stained clothing, in his pitiful weakness

Nacha read his tragic story at a glance. Here was a sick man! His eyes had lost the keenness they once possessed. They were faded and glazed, apparently incapable of concentrating on any object.

As the car crossed the Avenida de Mayo a fellow of very ordinary appearance, apparently a rustic, came up to Nacha and touched her on the shoulder. She introduced him to Monsalvat.

"We are to be married soon," she said. " I met him in the boarding-house where I live. We are going to the country, to his ranch—"

Nacha's fiancé was looking at Monsalvat with evident mistrust, and showed his impatience to get off the car.

"Where do you live?" asked Nacha, as they were leaving.

"Where do I live?" he exclaimed, as though that were the most singular of inquiries.

Then he grew pale again; and again his hands began to tremble.

"I want you to be a witness at our marriage," she pleaded as she pressed his hand with a tenderness he could not remember ever to have felt before.

"Come, come, we must be going!" the fiancé protested with ill-concealed annoyance.

"You can't refuse, Monsalvat. Please! Be good to me for this last time—Tell me where you live!"

Monsalvat heard a voice giving his address.

"He lives in my house, Madame. I am Moreno, the attorney, at your service. I consider myself a faithful friend of this illustrious gentleman. I belong to the ancient family of the Morenos of Chivilcoy; and though the unkind Fates. . . ."

Monsalvat no longer felt the pressure of that warm hand.

Nacha, on the arm of her future husband, had stepped down from the car.

CHAPTER XXIII

ARNEDO kept her locked up in first one house and then another, and Nacha's hatred of him grew until the intensity of her feeling frightened her. Such hate as this threatened to swallow up all other feelings, to absorb her utterly in itself, poisoning and destroying her. If she had been attracted to him before he carried her off, it was because she believed that he desired her. When she discovered, however, that his abduction of her was not for love, but for vengeance, to get even with Monsalvat; when she saw that he was actuated by something evil in him, which he could not have changed even though he had wanted to, she began to think of him as something monstrous and diabolical. He was the savage with no rôle to play in civilization, powerless—save for evil!

In the first prison he put her in she saw him only once, on the occasion when, pointing a revolver at her, he forced her to write the letter which was to be a final blow at Monsalvat. The effect of this incident on Nacha had been to rouse in her profound pity for the man she was so wounding. Again she was causing him suffering! She imagined him searching for her through all the dreary reaches of the city; and her constant thinking of him always brought her to one conclusion; for her, happiness

could consist only in offering up her whole being in sacrifice for this man!

The owners of both houses had presented her to their best patrons. Nacha, frantic with rage, had driven them out of her presence. She was determined to escape and threatened to get the police. But so close was the watch kept over her that she could not even get a letter into the mail-box. In the second house she was sent to she made friends with one of the girls, the unfortunate daughter of an English drunkard whose stepmother had driven her away from home. Nacha, through Laura's help, succeeded in having her case brought to the attention of two men who frequented the house on Laura's account. One of them, an influential lawyer, informed the police of the situation and Nacha was given her freedom. Pampa would have gone to prison if Nacha had not refused to admit that she knew who was responsible for her abduction.

Nacha was taken from this house to the police station, to state her case. The lawyer talked to her awhile; and, when he understood her situation, offered her money, and asked her what she was going to do.

"What can I do, sir? Follow my destiny. . . ."

"Your destiny? That word doesn't mean anything. Every one makes his own destiny. You ought to go back to your mother's."

"They won't take me back!"

"Very well then. I'll go see them and settle the matter."

Nacha meanwhile lived in the house where Julieta was lodged. Together the two girls went to the

tenement where Nacha had been living, to get her furniture and clothes. Although the room had been rented to someone else the caretaker very humbly and sanctimoniously collected half a month's rent from them, saying that Nacha would have to pay storage on her things before she could have them. She inquired for Monsalvat and learned that he had gone away. A few days later the lawyer told Nacha that she could return to her home. Her mother had died, and her sister, Catalina, was running the house.

Her sister received her with the indifference she might have shown to a stranger. When she found herself in her childhood home, Nacha could have wept, so many were the scenes that passed again through her memory. She thought of her absent mother, and of her meeting in that very house with Riga! But her sister's abrupt manner, assumed to conceal her feelings, Nacha believed—restrained her.

"When did—it happen?" asked Nacha.

"A month ago."

"Did she speak of me? Did she forgive me before she died?"

"Yes. And she asked me to look for you. But I scarcely knew where to find you."

This implied an effort which Catalina, as a matter of fact, had never made; nor had she any intention of looking for her sister. Her hope was that Nacha would never turn up, that she would thus be left in undisturbed possession of her mother's house. Soon after Nacha's disappearance, Cata had married a fellow quite inferior to her own station. Her

mother had been much offended at the match and refused to see Cata, choosing to consider her as completely lost as Nacha. But when the husband died, her mother consented to have her return to live with her. The property left the two daughters consisted of a small house in Liniers and the furnishings of the "pension"—some thirty thousand *pesos* all told.

Nacha found her sister much changed. Ten years earlier Cata had been a lively and not unattractive young person. Now she was slow in movement and heavy, and as she was very short, there was nothing graceful about her figure. In the old days, although they squabbled a great deal, the sisters had managed to get along together. But Cata's disposition had soured, though her ill-temper could not have been guessed from her fair-skinned and pretty face. Nacha noticed this change with alarm. How could she have become so bitter, and sharp-tongued, when she had once been so cheerful? What made her sister so envious and jealous, and full of petty meanness?

Nacha settled down in the house. She rarely went out, because she did not want to arouse suspicions in her sister. She helped with the multitudinous tasks of the household, and little by little took on all the work, as Cata skillfully disengaged herself from it. With the students and other men boarders Nacha's dealings were of the briefest. She barely spoke to them, so fearful was she of having Cata doubt her intentions of being an honest woman.

But it was written that Nacha must suffer in every

relationship. Cata was constantly spying upon her. If Nacha stopped a moment in the *patio* to exchange a few words with a boarder, her sister would eye her suspiciously and take up a position somewhere near at hand, so as to observe her. Nacha could not discuss the most trifling matter with her sister without hearing allusions to her past life. If they happened to be commenting on some one of the boarders, such as, for instance, the desirability of giving the preference to one student instead of another, in the question of terms, Cata would grow impatient.

"Of course, you must be right. You have known so many men. . . ."

Nacha might have borne such jibes in private. But her sister often got them off at table in front of everyone. Some of the boarders would laugh. Others felt secretly sorry for Nacha. Once, when Nacha did not eat what was on the plate before her, Cata asked:

"Doesn't this fare suit you? I suppose at the famous houses that you are used to living in, they had better cooks."

She was no more successful in finding happiness in other quarters. At first she had searched persistently for Monsalvat but had not obtained the slightest news of him. Torres or Ruiz de Castro could, she believed, have told her where he was, but she did not care to see either of these men. She remembered how Torres had lied to her, telling her that Monsalvat was in love with another woman. She had no reason to believe that he would not lie to her again. In Torres' opinion, as doubtless in

Ruiz de Castro's, she was to blame for Monsalvat's situation; she was an enemy, to be kept at a distance! Nevertheless, as the months went by and her anxiety concerning him increased, she went one day to Torres' office, and with tears in her eyes asked for news of her friend. Torres told her the truth. Monsalvat had been very ill, had fled from the sanatorium, and no one had the slightest idea where he was. Nacha, however, believed that Torres was trying to put her off, and left after reproaching him for his past cruelty towards her.

One morning there arrived at the "pension" a boarder who seemed startlingly out of place in that student boarding-house. Ht was a corpulent fellow, heavy-shouldered, slow-moving, with enormous hands, and short fat fingers. His face was not altogether ugly: the features were large and firmly cut, and as immobile as though carved in oakwood. On the day of his arrival he wore riding breeches and boots. He spoke rarely, as though he feared his voice might sound too loud; but he burst into great shouts of laughter at the nonsensical stories with which the students regaled the dinner table. Cata found out all there was to learn about his life. He was rich—owned a ranch in Pergamino—and had come to the *pension* because it had been recommended to him by one of the students who worked as one of his hands during the holidays. Little did he suspect that the young man in question had congratulated himself on thus providing his fellow students with excellent first-hand material for their amusement! Cata, however, would not allow the slightest disrespect to this "native" of whom she

made a protégé. By good-natured jokes at the beginning of their acquaintance, followed by maternal advice, Cata succeeded in bringing about certain changes in his attire, and modifying some of his rustic habits. The fellow was a good sort at bottom, and lent himself willingly to Cata's polishing, much to the amazement both of Nacha and the students who wondered what all this might portend.

One fine day Nacha discovered the explanation of her sister's conduct. The rancher began making love to her, and Nacha sensed that he did so at Cata's skillfully disguised instigation. Still Nacha could not understand Cata's sudden affection for her since the new boarder's arrival. Then she perceived that Cata was planning to get rid of her and was counting on the rancher's pliability in her determined hands, and also on Nacha's attractions.

His gallantries were far from being agreeable to Nacha, who did not find them improved by the fact that he was well provided with money. She was quite determined to refuse him when he finally declared his intentions. She had not foreseen that Cata would speak for him.

"You have no reason to refuse. Why should you be so hard to suit?"

Nacha lowered her head and remained silent a long time.

"Your presence here is compromising to me. Everyone knows about you, even though you appear to be respectable now. But some day you are sure to go back to your old ways. I'm still young enough to marry again—in fact I'm thinking quite seriously of it. Your being here is really very inconvenient.

It may interfere with my plans. Don't be angry! I'm only telling you the truth!"

Cata went on at some length advising her sister to make this sacrifice in atonement for her past sins —though really there was no great sacrifice in becoming a married woman at last and in going to live on a fine ranch with a man who was so good and so much in love! When Cata stopped talking Nacha raised her tear-filled eyes and said simply:

"Very well. I accept him."

Her suitor then discussed the matter with her. Nacha thought it only honest to tell him all about herself.

"So they told me!" the rancher replied with a coarse laugh.

Nacha was blank with amazement. Never had she believed her sister's perfidy could go so far!

"But look here, girlie, I rounded you up with the idea of getting married. It's fierce for a man to live alone all his life; and I thought it would be fine to have some one like you around!"

And he licked his lips at the prospect of the life awaiting him with Nacha as a companion.

Then she learned another detail concerning her sister's manoeuvres. A doctor in one of the distant provinces was paying court to Cata. Although he was poor, her scheming young sister had resolved not to let him escape. That had been her reason for speeding Nacha's departure. The rancher had said something about marriage to Nacha; but Cata, fearing that such formalities might involve too great delay, told him her sister's story and insinuated that he might take her away with him as his mistress.

"There are plenty of cow-punchers who carry off a girl and put her in the ranch-house with no question of marriage! It's better for them not to marry, of course. I don't say I approve of that sort of thing; but I can see that it's more convenient, and practical—and it's cheaper! Then, after a while, if they still like the girl, they can marry. If she doesn't suit, or they find another one they like better, they can let the first one go. . . . They all do that, all of them!"

Then, as if to put the finishing touch on her speech of persuasion, she added:

"That's what you men are like. You know how to live!"

At first her protégé listened to these words with stupefaction; then he assumed a greedy smile. Just to think that he might have been fool enough to get married! Country folk had reason to distrust these city people!

But Nacha resigned herself to the conditions devised, unknown to her, by her sister. She would suffer and serve; and after a few years of fidelity and submission on her part, the man might marry her. So the honest woman she was going to be would atone for the ten misspent years of her life. It was a tragic solution of her problem, for it took her away from Monsalvat forever—for all the rest of the time she might live on earth. . . .

Since resigning herself to this sacrifice she viewed the rancher with changed eyes. She discovered now that he had a few really admirable qualities. He was loyal, sincere, manageable and plucky, like the good son of the pampas that he was; and he showed

no small amount of genuine feeling. Nacha began to think that a woman of intelligence and skill might civilize this rough fellow without encountering very much discouragement. On the morning when she met Monsalvat, the rancher, really in love with her, and delighted with Nacha's sweetness of disposition, had promised to marry her there in Buenos Aires, before going to the ranch, sparing her the humiliation of the trying-out process to which he had intended to subject her.

Nacha went occasionally with him to the shops, to buy furnishings for the ranch house. It was on one of these shopping tours that she met Monsalvat.

Monsalvat was reading in bed next morning when there came a knock at the door. "Come in!" he called.

In the opening doorway Nacha appeared. She was dressed in black as on the preceding afternoon, and this sombre mourning emphasized the fairness of her skin, enhancing its charm. She seemed happy, light-hearted, as though her problem in life had been well disposed of.

Monsalvat lay back among his pillows at her request. His sight had grown very poor and persistent efforts to read had done him a great deal of harm. That morning his eyes were paining him severely. All the objects he looked at had the vague uncertain outline one sees in certain impressionist paintings. Without saying a word, Nacha noticed all the details of the room. Then she took off her hat, and, looking attentively at her friend, said, simply:

"I have come to stay."

"I knew you would come!" he replied, holding out a hand to her. "But I never dared hope that you would stay—"

"Always!" she said, taking his hand, and sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"Always?" he wondered. "How is that possible? Aren't you going to get married?"

"No—You need someone to take care of you. I can't marry now!"

"Why, Nacha?"

"Because such a marriage would be a lie. . . ."

Was he dreaming? There was no happiness such as this in the waking world! Nacha went on to say that she did not love the man she had intended marrying, nor could she ever love him. Why should she sacrifice herself?"

"You are right," Monsalvat exclaimed. "A sacrifice without a purpose, of no real utility, is absurd —more than that, is immoral! We ought only to sacrifice ourselves when we love our sacrifice. I believe, Nacha, that sacrifice ought to give us our highest spiritual enjoyment!"

Nacha was silent; but she was thinking that the sacrifice she was then entering upon was of such a kind. Had she married her rancher she would have had among other advantages, that security in life which only a vagabond or a woman such as she had once been, could appreciate fully. Money, a home, comforts, all these would have come to her with this marriage. And then if this man, fifteen years older than she, should die before she did, she would be free, and in possession of a fortune. On the other hand, with Monsalvat, nothing but anxiety

and trouble awaited her. Instead of a ranch, she would have a room in a tenement house; instead of a home, a poor friend in need of her care; instead of comfort, poverty; and instead of the day of liberation and inherited riches, long years of suffering at the bedside of a sick man. Two ways of sacrifice lay before her. But she did not hesitate now. Her lot was with Monsalvat. What though it should prove unhappy? In it she could find in the midst of suffering and pain, love and joy, without which, now that she had glimpsed them once again in Monsalvat's face, she could not live. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

NACHA'S disappearance caused her sister profound disgust. There were not hours enough in the day for the stories she told the boarders about her sister, in an attempt to discredit Nacha forever. The rancher was thoroughly indignant, believing that he had been made a fool of. He had always had his suspicions of city folk! And he stamped out of the house booted and spurred as on the day of his arrival, confident that his prompt withdrawal from this society was a means of getting even with Cata, her sister, the students, who now openly tittered at him, and all the rest of the capital's inhabitants.

A few days after taking a room in the house where Monsalvat was lodging Nacha wrote to her sister. She assured Cata she need no longer fear being compromised by her presence, since her desire to free herself of Nacha's society had been accomplished, even though not quite as she had planned. Her way lay open now to marriage with the doctor. Nacha would never annoy her nor see her again, if that suited Cata's desires. As to the rancher, Cata could throw all the blame on her in order to appease him, say what she would of her, even attribute to her the whole plan of the engagement. In this fashion Cata could wash her hands of the whole

affair, and the rancher need not leave the *pension.* Nacha wanted to ask him to forgive her for the trouble she had caused him; but she reflected that he probably would not understand her nor would anyone else for that matter. She had better let him think whatever had been put into his head by her sister.

Nacha borrowed a little money from the lawyer who had so disinterestedly come to her help before. This sum she hoped to return when her mother's house had been sold and she received her share of the inheritance. She paid Monsalvat's debts and used the rest of her money to provide him with clothing, Monsalvat protesting all the while, and even growing angry. But whenever Nacha threatened to leave him, he meekly allowed her to do as she pleased.

Little by little he grew better. Nacha's presence was a powerful tonic. Every afternoon they went out together for a walk to Palermo, to the Zoological Gardens, to Lezama Park. In a few months Monsalvat had recovered from his seriously weakened condition.

But while his general health improved, his eyesight grew steadily poorer. Newspapers were now quite beyond him. He could read nothing but books in large type, and then only with the help of a magnifying glass. One morning he had to admit that even that had become impossible. The objects in his room had receded, and came forward only to meet his outstretched hands. He was living in a mysterious, all-enveloping, and constantly deepening dusk. Up to that moment he had paid small heed

to this trouble, believing it would pass with the rest of his ill-health. But on that morning the cruel thought came to him in all its horror—night was falling on his life! He was alone in a vast solitude, cut off from the world, from his friends, from Nacha. The realization of what was happening to him taxed all his resources of courage. As he searched the depths of his soul for the needed help, the world seemed to grow small, as ephemeral as a glittering bubble. After all, this last and greatest catastrophe was but a trifling detail in the universal tragedy! The ideas he had lived by lost their significance too in the slow, throbbing ache of this new pain. Death had already claimed a part of him!

He had mentioned to Nacha on several occasions that his sight was dim, and she, from her own observations had been well aware of it. Quite recently he had taken to leaning on her arm when they went out walking. But he could speak of this trouble only so long as he thought it unimportant. Now he was afraid to speak of it. Doing so might make it worse! He would say nothing; and when it had passed, he would remember his fears and confess them to Nacha. But would it pass? Monsalvat tried to use the power of suggestion on himself, fill his mind with hope, not so much for the sake of the hope itself as to be able to live, to go on living. How face the prospect of endless night? How endure the touch of Death's hand on living eyes?

But when Nacha came to his room one morning she understood what had happened. She did not utter a word; but Monsalvat felt that she had sensed

his fear, his certainty! As she stood beside him, emotion mastered him for the moment. Holding out his arms to her, he drew her to him.

"Nacha!" His voice broke and he made a quick gesture, hinting at the cause of his distress.

"Don't feel so badly about it. We'll go to the doctor's this afternoon. Surely they will get well. . . .!"

But her eyes filled with tears and, though he could no longer see her, she hid her face.

Nacha had already spoken of her fears to Torres, who called on his friend and watched him intently. He gave Nacha little encouragement. This had prepared her somewhat for an unfavorable report from the specialist. But she had spent the interval between Torres' visit and this call at the clinic in a state of increasing anxiety. Whenever she was with Monsalvat she could not keep her eyes away from his, as though her own clear sight must somehow summon his vision from the depths into which it had retreated.

The specialist made a long and thorough examination, and shook his head. There was no hope—

"Your case is not so serious, brother!" he said to Monsalvat. "I'll give you some drops which will improve your general eye condition a little."

"You think I will get better then?"

"A little—yes. It's quite possible. Science can do a great deal—and nature too has her surprises. In short, there's no reason to despair. I've seen worse cases!"

They left the clinic and went home. They must be alone for awhile! In spite of the doctor's words,

Monsalvat thought that despair would choke him; and Nacha could not bear to watch his suffering without trying to console him. Besides, an idea had occurred to her after her recent interview with Torres, an idea, which even in the midst of the dejection she shared with Monsalvat, had the power to bring her great happiness.

On reaching the house they went to Monsalvat's room, and Nacha turned the key in the lock to keep out the Moreno children.

"I want to tell you something," she began, helping Monsalvat to find a chair, and sitting down beside him.

"How ghastly this thing is, Nacha!" he murmured.

"We'll find a way out. Every problem in life has an answer—if we can only find it!"

She drew his head towards her and kissed him on the forehead, while her hand caressed his neck and eyes. At any other time Monsalvat would have been startled by such tenderness on her part. Only three or four times, on the occasion of some surpassing emotion, had they ever kissed; and then as brother and sister might. But now he did not know how to interpret her caresses. Was it possible that Nacha loved him? Loved him as a lover, and not as she had so persistently believed? His old passion for her stirred within him anew, and an immeasurable sweetness poured through his being. Yet he exclaimed:

"It isn't worth while living like this!"

The words were decisive for Nacha. She did not look at him but she knew that he was waiting;

and slowly, with tears in her eyes, she brought her head close to his and kissed him on the lips.

"You must not say that," she whispered. "You must not say anything against Life—the life God made!"

And strangely, in the midst of this new and overwhelming trouble, Monsalvat tasted happiness. Nacha loved him! And Nacha for her part wondered how it was that she had never before known how great was her love for this man, who sat there blind and silent before her. It was better that it should have come about in such a fashion, better that her love had so delayed in revealing itself. Now it could soften the blow Fate was dealing him!

"I want you to listen," she said. "I have found the answer. . . ."

Monsalvat turned towards her as if to look at her. No words came from his lips but his expression showed that he felt he was in the presence of something surpassingly beautiful, something which was to consecrate his life. His heart-beats quickened. In that silence he lived with an intensity that crowded years into those few moments. His soul was waiting, with an anxiety mixed with pain and faith and love; and there was in this pause something of that breathless suspense which comes before a storm, or descends upon an artist as he listens to the voices crying out to him to create them in beauty.

In the darkness around him he heard Nacha's voice, warm with emotion, but confident, resolute.

"Once, more than a year ago, you asked me something. I refused then, though I loved you in my heart! . . . It was because I did not want to hurt

you, to spoil your chance in life. You had given everything you had for me, and lost everything through me. Now I can ask the same thing of you. . . ."

She stopped. In a flash the future swept before her: she saw Monsalvat as he was, sick, blind, forever incapable of earning enough to live on; alone in the world, with nothing before him but suffering and endless night. She grew pale and looked away.

"Now I want you . . . to marry me . . ." she said slowly.

He dropped his head and was silent. For some time neither of them stirred. Neither cared to break that pause in which the tragedy of each of their lives was to find its solution.

"No!" he said at last.

He heard Nacha sob.

"I love you too much, Nacha," he went on, "to accept such a sacrifice. Stay with me, take care of me for a little while—yes—that I can allow—but to let you unite your life that is still so young with that of a broken invalid—no! I cannot."

His words, falling like so many blows on her heart, only strengthened her resolution.

"I am not doing this out of affection nor out of gratitude. It is for my own sake!"

"Nacha, you are young! You must not sadden your whole life—look at the situation I am in. It is more than probable that I shall have hunger, poverty at least, to look forward to."

"I can resign myself to all that. You told me once that it was necessary to suffer—I have never forgotten what you said!"

"But a whole lifetime of it, Nacha!"

"A whole lifetime then! I accept it—I desire it. I want to redeem the past—I want to deserve forgiveness. . . ."

"Who is there to forgive you, Nacha?" he exclaimed, drawing her toward him.

"I don't know—God, perhaps, if he exists. Life, against which I have sinned—Love, that I have wronged—myself—myself especially: I need to earn forgiveness from myself!"

And slowly, wonderingly, but inevitably, Monsalvat found her lips. She was answered!

"Your life is mine, Fernando," she said gently, and Monsalvat knew from her voice that she was smiling. "Your suffering is my suffering, your joy my joy! Only death can part us."

And on those blind eyes a great light descended, infinite, filling the world; and he knew that some of this radiance sprang from the depths of his own soul, glorifying the years that lay before him, and before all his suffering, hungering, striving human brothers. . . .

EPILOGUE

TWO years had passed since their marriage. Nacha had taken up the management of her mother's house, and was proving skillful at a task which her sister's flight to a distant province with her new husband greatly simplified for her.

For Monsalvat her devotion knew no bounds. With Nacha beside him he scarcely needed eyes; but he could not reconcile himself to his uselessness. If he had only been able at least to go on working for the poor and the oppressed! He had to content himself with gathering together the children of the neighborhood and teaching them whatever he could, without the use of his sight. It annoyed him not to be able to teach them to read; for he believed that if ever the world was to be made new it would be through love, and through books! Of these last he gave as many as he could afford to the boys and girls who showed promise of making good use of what he taught them.

The presence of this blind man was a strange note in the little middle class boarding-house. The students all felt a deep and affectionate veneration for him. Many of them became his friends, and not a few his true disciples. They read to him, and together they discussed articles and books; but these young people liked best to hear him talk of that

vision which never ceased to shine in his darkness. At times his words flamed with the passion for justice within him. At others they seemed to pour out quietly and evenly like so many beams of that light in which, to his listeners, beauty and truth was revealed.

Since he had come there to live, gross words and vulgar anecdotes had vanished as if by magic. At the long dinner-table there seemed now always to be something to talk about; for the students shared their day's experiences and discoveries with Don Fernando, and the ideas they had found interesting grew and became animate as they discussed them with their blind host.

When they sat together in the evening, talking and dreaming of new forms of beauty which might come into being on the earth, there would come a hush as the blind man spoke of his gods: Life and Love, and Mankind. His fervent words sowed faith in the young hearts of his hearers.

So the days passed, and the night in which he lived was no longer tragic as at first; but sweet, peaceful, and alive with familiar voices. For him there gleamed little familiar stars in the depths of that all-enveloping darkness.

Weeks and months passed; and the last days of July arrived in a tragic year, feverish days when War stepped into the scene and claimed every conversation wherever a group gathered. The sirens of the newspaper buildings gave the news which set moving through the city crowds sick with dread, bewildered, obsessed by images of war, delirious. Newspaper headlines, infected by the general mad-

ness, grew to enormous size, quivering before the eyes of their troubled readers; and the familiar world was clad in the terrible strangeness of a bad dream.

Monsalvat could not escape learning the monstrous news. His face drawn and pale, he listened to the reading of newspapers, countless newspapers; and in the squares and public places he heard the distress and horror of the throng. Yet even then his hard-won serenity did not abandon him.

The Great War began, and one afternoon in August the students brought in the news that the German cavalry was invading France. Most of the students were already at the dinner-table. Those who came in cried out from the doorway:

"It's begun. Germany has invaded French soil!"

The brutal news was a whiplash to all those gathered there. They were silent a moment, and then came a flood of words, words of amazement, of imprecation, or of sympathy. One student jumped to his feet with a cry of *"Vive la France!"*

But the blind man said nothing. He seemed lost in his own thoughts. At last, at a chance word, he began to speak, and his voice betrayed his distress, though serenity, optimism, illusion, still possessed him.

"This war is a monstrous crime," he said, "the greatest crime ever yet committed on this earth. Not so much on account of the millions of human beings it will destroy, as because it tears to shreds one of the finest illusions ever dreamed by generous hearts."

A shadow passed over his face:

"But in spite of everything, let the infamy of this war be welcome! *They* have willed it, *they* shall have it!"

His hearers looked at one another with questioning eyes. Then in a flash they understood.

"Who are *They?*" "Those," he replied, "who, controlling forces, abuse them; who, possessing plenty, let the hungry starve; who, enjoying happiness, stir not a finger to make a better world, that all may have their chance to live, and love, and give! The powerful, I mean, who change life to death, and love to hatred!"

"But the Day *is* coming," he cried. "This war is indeed the beginning of *Der Tag!* I feel it coming—a part of it is here already within my heart. I do not know how it is to come, whether little by little, or suddenly, flamingly, like an avenger!

But I know that the Day is coming—the Day that will be sacred to Justice!"

In the silence that followed, the young minds to whom he had spoken thought of what such a day would mean, to each of them, to all whom they knew; and the eyes of some of those who listened, dreaming and desiring better things, grew wet. . . .

At the far end of the table, Monsalvat, head erect, sat gazing at the future, at what lay beyond the great Crime, at that Dawn whose splendor would justify the hopes of the dead, and the efforts of the living.

And his night lifted and lightened with the radiance of innumerable stars.

THE END

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